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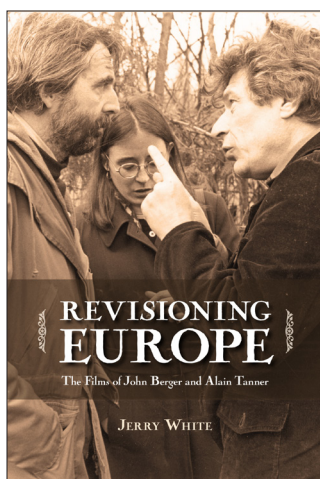
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REVISIONING EUROPE: THE FILMS OF JOHN BERGER AND ALAIN TANNER

by Jerry White

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BERGER AND TANNER BEFORE “BERGER AND TANNER”

“Working conditions and economic pressures put direct cinema in a political situation, even if the majority of the films in that style don’t want to be, or aren’t in the first place, political films.”
– Jean-Louis Comolli, “Le détour par le direct,” part 1 (52)¹

It is common to speak of Berger and Tanner’s collaboration in terms of three films: *La Salamandre* (1971), *Le Milieu du monde* (1974), and *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l’an 2000* (1976). Berger, in his 1985 interview with Richard Appignanesi, mentions those three, and also mentions their 1966 short documentary *Une Ville à Chandigarh* in passing (298); that’s also true of Tanner’s interview with Christian Dimitriu (108). But there were other manifestations of their collaboration, and furthermore it is important not to give short shrift to *Une Ville à Chandigarh* by referring to it as though it meant basically nothing to the history of their work together. That most of this collaboration was for television and a lot of it is uncredited or informal accounts for much of its invisibility, even to Tanner and Berger themselves. That is fair enough. Nevertheless, the films *Une Ville à Chandigarh* (1966, directed by Tanner, commentary by Berger), *Mike et l’usage de la science* (1968, “Reportage et réalisation: Alain Tanner, avec la participation de John Berger”), and *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* (1968, directed by Tanner) are important parts both of Swiss documentary and of the œuvres of Berger and Tanner themselves. Their formal patterns and political engagements

are well worth discussing by way of easing into the better-known (and, yes, more fully realized) films that the two made together. Moreover, this pre-*Salamandre* work constitutes, in its own right, an intellectually vigorous and formally ambitious engagement with the possibilities of television, a medium whose aesthetic and ideological contours were still very much up for grabs in the 1960s. Moreover, this documentary work anticipates a lot of the concerns of those three narrative films, partially on the level of form but more clearly on the level of subject matter and narrative structure. Thanks to the good work of the archivists at Télévision Suisse Romande, almost all of these films are available for viewing on their website (and I give the addresses for each film at the end of this book). They are well worth viewing.

Equally worth viewing is, of course, Tanner's film *Le Retour d'Afrique* (1974), a film that Tanner made between *La Salamandre* (1971) and *Le Milieu du monde* (1974). This is also a film that may seem like it belongs in this chapter, which is basically devoted to "semi-collaborations" between the two. In 1985 Berger told Appignanesi: "There was another film in between, called *Return to Africa*, which I didn't collaborate on... It was a story that more or less happened to two friends of mine, and I told it to Alain one evening in some detail" (306). *Retour d'Afrique* is a story about an idealistic young couple who plan to give up their bohemian life in Geneva and go to Algeria but can never quite manage to leave, even though they sell all their possessions. As a narrative it is certainly consistent with both Berger and Tanner's interests in the ravages of consumer culture, especially on restless, idealistic youth, and cinematically speaking it features a lot of the meta-cinematic and distancing effects that are common to Tanner's films of this period.

But even though Berger speaks of *Le Retour d'Afrique* as a kind of 'half-collaboration' (he said to Appignanesi that "when two people have collaborated on, say, three and a half films ..." [300]). I have chosen to more or less exclude it because of my sense that the collaboration does not seem to have gone beyond a single, albeit very detailed, conversation. *Une Ville à Chandigarh* and *Mike et l'usage de la science* really do seem to have involved Berger co-creating a work with Tanner. That's definitely true of *Une Ville*, and while the details of collaboration on *Mike* are a bit sketchier, the fact that Berger is actually in the film makes it seem like a far more collaborative affair than *Retour d'Afrique*. Now, admittedly I know of no explicit

collaboration between Berger and Tanner at all on *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*, even at the level of a conversation such as the one that gave birth to *Retour d'Afrique*. But it is clear that *Docteur B.* is very close indeed to Berger's 1967 book *A Fortunate Man* (another collaboration with Jean Mohr), both at the level of subject matter and form. Indeed, it is impossible to offer a full account of the workings of *Docteur B.* without talking about *A Fortunate Man*, impossible to really understand that work of Tanner's without talking about that work of Berger's. There is no comparable "twin" in Berger's oeuvre for *Retour d'Afrique*.

Tanner, Berger, and Television Documentary

In addition to its second-class status as television documentaries, another reason that this material may not be very well known is because at first glance it seems atypical for both Tanner and Berger. Tanner had very mixed feelings about documentary and television alike, and the period when he became really famous seems to be synonymous with the period when he left both forms. Nobody who knew Tanner's widely circulated work of the 1970s and 80s would necessarily suspect that he had made films like *Une Ville à Chandigarh* or *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*, which are both complex interventions in an emerging cinéma vérité aesthetic. Berger, on the other hand, spent the 1960s and 70s embracing the idea that realism needed to be revitalized, and he is no stranger to television; the catalogue for Gareth Evans' 2005 season devoted to Berger's work notes that "At the heart of John Berger's oeuvre lies a body of work (features, series and documentaries) in film and television" (25). In addition to working collaboratively in film and television, Berger also worked with the Swiss photographer Jean Mohr, with whom he made photo-books about village communities and migrant workers. But nobody who knew Berger's work of this period would necessarily suspect that he had collaborated on a film like *Mike et l'usage de la science*, which is about a thoughtful nuclear scientist from Geneva.

Television was first introduced in Switzerland (by the state) in 1953, and it became, in fairly short order, something of a political battleground. Its origins are as a committee of the Société Suisse de Radiodiffusion (SSR) on television experiments, which was first introduced in 1950 (as the

Commission fédérale pour les questions de télévision); a second committee, on cultural matters (Commission fédérale pour l'étude des questions culturelles touchant la télévision), was introduced in 1952 (this is explained in Rostan, 47). By 1956 the government was trying to write support for television into the constitution, but the effort failed when it, like all proposed constitutional amendments, was put to a public referendum in 1957. François Vallotton recalls how its opponents played on a populist fear of the new medium, including the idea that it meant the end of radio, adopting the slogan "pas un sou de la radio pour la télévision": "not a penny from the radio for TV" (43). Television nevertheless quickly acquired considerable political influence in Switzerland; Vallotton also recalls how during the 1950s, "One journalist had even spoken of Marcel Bezençon, then director of SSR, as the '8th Federal Councillor'" (43).² This was due in large part to the network's role in reporting a series of political scandals, such as the decision of the minister responsible for the Département militaire fédérale, Paul Chaudet, to explain his role in an arms-sale controversy on television rather than on the radio or through the written press. Vallotton summarizes the anxiety that this newfound influence provoked by explaining a Swiss fear of an emerging "télécratie helvétique" (45). This widespread uncertainty about the future of television in Swiss life led to the creation of a new policy for both radio and TV, which both shored up the new medium institutionally and gave it a civically oriented mandate. The policy came into force in 1964. SSR's mandate is laid out in article 13: "The programs broadcast by SSR must defend and develop the country's cultural values and contribute to the spiritual, moral, religious, civic and artistic formation of the listeners and viewers.... The programs must serve the interests of the country, reinforce national unity, and contribute to international understanding" (Rostan 71).³ This was, as I discussed in the introduction, the year after Switzerland's 1963 Loi fédérale sur le cinéma was introduced. It was thus a period of great tumult, and great possibility, for a publicly-oriented vision of both filmmaking and television.

It is a period that was formative for Tanner: just as he was active in gaining the acceptance and implementation of the 1963 cinema law, he started working for SSR the year after this new policy was put into force. His first work for the station was *Le Droit au logement* (broadcast 4 February 1965), a twenty-minute piece strongly influenced by the John-Grierson-produced

Housing Problems (1935). This was made as part of the series “Continents sans visa,” which became important as a venue where national and international issues were held in close balance. Here is how Vallotton explains it:

In French-speaking Switzerland, the two news flagships “Continents sans visa,” as well as “Temps présent,” took account of little-known international realities and sensitized the public opinion to the brutality of the North-South relationship. “Continents sans visa” also took on certain hot topics with a show on banking secrecy in 1964, as well as with a “Dossier,” directed by Alain Tanner, about “The Swiss Worker” (19 May 1966). This clearly activist broadcast was followed by a similar program on “The Swiss Peasant” and, a year later, “The Swiss Boss.” (50)⁴

Despite this sense of excitement surrounding the early days of Swiss television, Tanner has always been clear that working for SSR was, at best, a mixed experience. Dimitriu has written that “The relationship between Tanner and television has always been that of the impossible love between a filmmaker who needs to be able to make images freely, not necessarily documentaries, and an institution that produces them but which upholds the laws of rationalization, and thus of bureaucracy” (22).⁵ That desire to create freely is, of course, at the heart of the matter, and Tanner began as an agnostic about documentary and fiction when it came to searching for an environment where he could work as he wished. He wrote, in 1980, a sort of “ABCs” of television called “Télé-aphorismes” (which is reprinted and translated here, as Appendix 1), wherein he laid out his belief in the stages of televisual development. And although that essay is fairly pessimistic overall about the possibilities of the medium, in the entry for “Phases” he hints at what he found in the medium during the 1960s:

Phases. There have been three phases in the development of television, three ways to look at it. The first was a period of creativity, of work, and of a bit of belief. The second was the discovery of what television really is, accompanied by a perverse

gorging on codes and signs, and a sort of third-degree joy in those codes and signs, a joy that goes right on up to understanding, and then to the quick exhaustion of that understanding. The third phase is now: a piece of furniture, with a bit of soccer and some old movies late at night. (31)⁶

Tanner and Berger made the material in this chapter halfway between phases one and two. The first phase, for Swiss television, was really the early experimental days, the days of those SSR committees which, because television had no real institutional status at all, were sustained entirely by hard work and faith in the future. But the immediately post-1964 period was clearly still a creative time, animated by a certain amount of belief as well, belief in television as a genuinely popular medium. But with the preliminary experiments now a fading memory, that belief was now coupled with a fairly rigorous understanding of what television really was, of its codes and signs. These productions – especially *Mike et l'usage de la science* and *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* – are unimaginable in any medium other than television.

That said, Tanner has never seemed entirely at home in documentary, televisual or otherwise. He wrote in *Ciné-mélanges* that:

I hadn't made a documentary film in thirty years. In fiction, you say "I" and that gives you more free space. In saying "I," you have no obligation to anyone but yourself and the spectators. In documentary, you say "Them" and you have some obligation to them; you're not free to take advantage of them, without their agreement and their participation. But you mustn't make the film on them because that would place you outside and that's not a good place to be. You have to be with them, so that "them" gets changed into "us." This is the good place to work on a documentary. (41)⁷

Tanner was speaking there of making of two films thirty years apart – *L'Identité galloise* (1965), a nineteen-minute documentary he made for SSR, and *Les Hommes du port* (1995), which he produced independently. He argues in *Ciné-mélanges* that the culture of the Welsh miners that he tried

to portray in the 1960s was similar in some ways to that of the Genoese dock workers, whose professionalism and incredibly well-organized union is the subject of his elegiac film of the 1990s. This trepidation in speaking as “nous” rather than “je” is a signal of Tanner’s respect for the political possibilities of documentary, and his understanding of the ethical pitfalls it presents as well. These ethical pitfalls, as well as these political possibilities, were the subject of a lot of debate in the 1960s, when Tanner was making documentaries in the style that was, really, ground zero for such debate: direct cinema.

This was a movement that Tanner helped to found. Tanner’s first film was a short documentary that he co-directed with Claude Goretta in London: 1957’s *Nice Time*. Because of its hand-held camera work and interest in the everyday (it is shot over the course of an evening in Piccadilly Circus), it became a signature part of the “Free Cinema” movement. It was shown on the third program of the legendary Free Cinema shows that played that year at the British Film Institute’s National Film Theatre, programs that were, I mentioned in the introduction, reviewed for *Sight and Sound* by one John Berger. “Free Cinema” is certainly an important predecessor to cinéma vérité or cinéma direct, but one crucial aspect of that aesthetic that *Nice Time* lacks is extensive use of synchronous sound. That use of synchronous sound, that ability to allow people to talk at length in spontaneous rather than staged situations (which would have been necessary for an earlier generation of heavier, lankier sound recorders and microphones), is a big part of what makes it possible to make films with people rather than just about people, to speak as “nous” rather than “je.” Nevertheless, Tanner’s first film is part of that international moment of direct cinema that so strongly marks the late 1950s and 60s, and its formal and political idealism is a constant presence in his work before *La Salamandre*.

Geoff Dyer argues that something very similar is going on in Berger’s work during this period. He spends a lot of time in his book-length study *Ways of Telling* explaining the importance of a revitalized realist practice for the kind of aesthetics that he saw as a necessary response to the ravages of bourgeois capitalism. To a great extent this was a matter of a Georg-Lukács-inspired distinguishing between a naturalism that makes fetishes of surface details for basically formalist ends and a realism that uses these details to make the social, political, and historical reality of a work of art

an integral part of its meaning. Drawing on Berger's reviews for the *New Statesman*, Dyer recalls that he felt in the 1950s that artists worked in a "narrow laboratory atmosphere" that was fully dependent on support from the bourgeoisie, and that this

... went hand in hand with a social base of the visual arts that had shrunk to the point where they could not contain the broad scope of which Berger hoped they were capable. What Berger had prophesied in painting was, however, occurring in other areas of communication; on literary, drama and television. Berger noted that the works such as *The Lambeth Boys*, *Look Back in Anger*, *The Kitchen*, and *Room at the Top* satisfied "many of my often repeated critical demands." (24)

Berger was noting, basically, the importance of British Free Cinema (*The Lambeth Boys*) and its successors in feature-narrative filmmaking (*Look Back in Anger*, *The Kitchen*, and *Room at the Top*). These British filmmakers translated their use of freewheeling camera work and quotidian subject matter into studies of Britain's underclass, studies that made the simmering rage and lost human potential of that underclass the stuff of politically inflected tragedy (for me the best example of this is Karel Reisz's 1960 film *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, a work I am surprised to see missing from this roll call). In this way they are quite distinct from their contemporaries in the French New Wave, whose references, especially in the early 1960s, were mostly based not in their local political reality but in other films, frequently those from Hollywood (which, having been banned during the German occupation of their youth, took on a discernable, if entirely post-facto, subversive edge). The point for the early New-Wavers, after all, was to revolutionize French cinema, which they saw as being trapped in a stale, pretentious literary mindset. This mindset was eviscerated in Truffaut's fiery 1954 essay "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" (first published in the *Cahiers du cinéma* 31, at the same time Truffaut was also writing for the right-leaning magazine *Arts*; it is also reprinted in his collection *Le Plaisir des yeux*). That now-famous polemic castigated the French tendency to glorify the screenwriter at the expense of the director. Both early auteurism and the New Wave were revolutionary challenges, then, but challenges

to French cinema, not to French society at large (this changes, especially chez Godard, as the 60s wear on). Dyer goes on to say that “Berger was *for* a reintegration of art and society as part of a larger political project at a time when technological and social changes were causing art to become increasingly self-determining, increasingly grounded in its own logic” (26). In cinema one of the most important technological changes of the 50s and 60s was the emergence of lightweight camera and sound gear. This technology was without doubt a driver of the French New Wave, and it was that technology that enabled the movement to become more self-determining. But its most famous members (Truffaut for sure, Godard until 1965’s *Pierrot le fou*) used that self-determination to turn inward, to ground their films in their own logic of Parisian bohemianism and cinephilic knowingness. This formulation is not exactly the “anarchistes de droite” that Tanner recalled creeping him out during his 1958 visit to Paris, but it’s close. The technology of direct cinema allowed a new kind of filmmaking to emerge, but the political orientation of such filmmaking varied greatly from place to place, despite aesthetic similarities. Berger saw this emergence as consistent with his own desire for an art that integrated the details of social and political reality into its aesthetic, but what was going on in France was basically inconsistent with this desire.

This is ironic, because at the theoretical level there are two figures that are of inescapable relevance for both Berger and Tanner’s ideas about collaboration, aesthetics, and documentary: Jean Rouch and Jean-Louis Comolli. You will recall that I mentioned, in the introduction, Tanner’s invocation of Comolli specifically as being important to his filmmaking. He was similarly complimentary about Rouch, specifically in the context of the films – all made for television – that I am discussing here. He told *Positif*’s Laurent Bonnard in 1972 that “Television was the beginning of the experience of synch sound, the handheld camera; it followed Rouch’s first experiments, for example. Fiction didn’t attract me and dramas didn’t interest me at all” (31).⁸ As early as 1961 Tanner was proclaiming his love for Rouch: in an interview for *Journal de Genève*’s “Samedi littéraire” that dealt with the three-screen short film *L’École* (a study of school architecture which had been commissioned for the 1962 Venice Triennial), he said that “In France, my favourite is Jean Rouch. He is on the cutting edge of research into a new language and the discovery of the truth [‘de la vérité,’ so this is probably

a double-entendre with cinéma vérité, the documentary film movement]” (“Alain Tanner: Trois films”).⁹ Rouch was a celebrated ethnographic filmmaker (he made many films in Africa during the 1950s) and a very early adopter of the technology of direct cinema. His cameraman on the famous 1960 film *Chronique d'un été* was the Québécois Michel Brault, who brought to the production then-cutting-edge camera and sound gear that he had developed while working at the National Film Board of Canada. In Peter Wintonick's documentary *Cinéma Vérité: The Decisive Moment*, Rouch recalls how Brault had brought from Quebec the prized objects of both “micro-cravats” – lavalier microphones – and “lentilles interdits” – by which he meant impossible-to-obtain 60 mm lenses. Rouch used this equipment to film what he jokingly called his “own tribe”: Parisians in their native environs (the city's streets and small apartments). He then showed this footage back to his subjects and edited in their responses to it by way of a coda for the film. This is a very good example of what Comolli argued, in the two-part essay on direct cinema that I mentioned in the introduction, is characteristic of the form: “The traditional divide between ‘the action to film’ and ‘the action of filming’ resolves itself in ‘filmed action’” (part 2, 42).¹⁰ For Rouch this “filmed action” is not only the simple record of young Parisians living their lives but also the experience of having those lives filmed, of working together with the camera crew – sometimes explicitly, as at the end, and sometimes implicitly, as throughout the rest of the film. The technology that makes this collapse possible is a core part of the film itself, something that grounds the film inescapably in the moment of 1960s Paris, with all of its social and political instability but also its sense as a genuine metropolis, a place where all manner of people interact and collaborate in spontaneous, unpredictable ways. Without the technology itself, such interaction remains just a possibility; the technology is constitutive of the political and historical moment, not simply a neutral tool to record it. “As much as you'd like to respect the document, you can't help but **fabricate** it,” Comolli writes. “It doesn't pre-exist the reportage, but is instead its product” (part 1, 48–49, bold in the original).¹¹ It is a very good example of the kind of realism that Berger was looking for, an aesthetic, fabricated object which is nevertheless the product of a social interaction. *Chronique d'un été*'s doing away with the split between “action à filmer” and “action de filmer” means that it has, in essence, moved away from using people simply as subject matter, as action

à filmer. Although Rouch's voice is present, speaking in first person on the film's soundtrack, there is a very real way in which he is speaking not as "je" but as "nous," as Tanner believes a documentarian should.

The films that I want to discuss here – *Une Ville à Chandigarh*, *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*, and *Mike et l'usage de la science* – are all significant for the challenges that they pose to the documentary practice of direct cinema, especially as enunciated by Rouch and Comolli. Tanner and Berger are working on these films after Rouch's best work has been shown throughout the francophone world and just before Comolli was writing his theoretical treatise. They proceed from some of the same assumptions Rouch was making and share a lot of the political idealism of Comolli, but they are often coming to very different conclusions about the formal and ethical stakes of documentary cinema. *Une Ville à Chandigarh* is a highly aestheticized work, one that integrates social and historical detail very tightly but which does so in a very self-conscious way that looks at times like direct cinema but which is actually something more hybrid, more between older and emerging documentary forms. *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* looks more like a "conventional" work of direct cinema and helps draw attention to the cinematic quality of Berger's literary work of this period, especially *A Fortunate Man*, the 1967 book to which this film is an obvious companion. *Mike et l'usage de la science* is the oddest of these films: it has few of the stylistic traits of direct cinema, but the film's politics are more consistent with Comolli's sense of direct as inherently oppositional than are the other two films. These three films, then, rather than simple hack-work done for Swiss television before "real" films like *La Salamandre* or *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000*, together constitute a wide-ranging inquiry into a form that was, in the 1960s, at the leading edge of political cinema. And crucially, this inquiry was being conducted not in a "narrow laboratory atmosphere," but in the most widely diffused medium of its day: television.

Une Ville à Chandigarh

Its roots should not fool you. Even though it was partially commissioned by Swiss Air as a tribute to the work of the ultra-rationalist Swiss urban planner Le Corbusier (1887–1965), *Une Ville à Chandigarh* is an aesthetically complex piece of work. It was the place where Berger and Tanner, working together for the first time (Tanner directed the film and oversaw

the shooting; Berger wrote the voice-over text, after the fact), were able to outline some of their ideas about modernity, the sound-image relationship, and political art.

As with Tanner's early film *Nice Time* (1957), *Une Ville à Chandigarh* frequently looks and feels like a piece of mid-60s direct cinema, but it is in fact defined by an older ethic of documentary. I mentioned in note 2 of the introduction that, although *Nice Time* has a lot of hand-held camera work, it actually has very little synchronous sound; this is quite typical of documentaries of the 1950s and 60s, the period of transition between post-synched and synchronized sound in documentary. Furthermore, it's typical of Tanner's work of this period, and not only of *Nice Time*. Recalling his first feature-length film, a 1964 documentary about young carpentry apprentices called *Les Apprentis*, he told Dimitriu that "We shot *Les Apprentis* in a basically anachronistic way (although these techniques [of direct cinema] didn't exist in Switzerland), with a big, blimped 35 mm camera, even though it was an ideal subject for a more free-wheeling style" (100).¹² Even a cursory viewing of *Les Apprentis* (available in full at TSR's website) bears this out; there is very little in the way of handheld or genuinely mobile camera work in the film, although there is plenty of synch sound, shot on location. Although *Une Ville à Chandigarh* was actually shot on 16 mm, something very similar is going on aesthetically, if slightly in reverse; there is plenty of camera movement, but little synch sound. The only moment of such sound in the entire film is its concluding shot, which is of a woman singing. She is held in a medium close-up, and the camera does not move at all; whether the camera was blimped I cannot say, but this is just as static an image as those of *Les Apprentis*. There is a lot of hand-held camera work in *Une Ville à Chandigarh*, it's just that the soundtrack is either made up of the text written by Berger or of "wild sound." A sequence showing a Sikh harvest dance is particularly illustrative here. This is an event filled with colour and kinesis, and the camera moves all around the space, more or less holding the dancers in long shot. Tanner is obviously using a wide-angle lens here, and the visual field in all of the images feels open and full of possibility. In short, a classic kind of vérité sensibility is at work here, one that emphasizes dynamic visuals and a sense of spontaneity. But what is missing is the *sound* of vérité. All of the sounds of a parade and dancing are present (in addition to spoken text, which observes how the methods

of harvest are far less precise than this dance), but they are not meaningfully in synch with the dancers, not comparable to the concluding sequence where the woman's lips are really moving with the sound of the song. This is the direct cinema of *Les Raquetteurs* (Quebec, 1959), whose soundtrack full of city noises, cheering spectators and barking dogs was almost entirely "built" in an editing studio; it is the direct cinema of *Primary* (USA, 1960), a film whose only really synchronous images are those of politicians giving speeches to one or two almost completely static cameras.

To put it in Swiss terms, this is the direct cinema of *Quand nous étions petits enfants*, Henry Brandt's 1964, feature-length documentary portrait of a small village in the Jura mountains of Neuchâtel. Tanner recalled to Dimitriu that "Inspired by the English experience of 'Free Cinema' and Brandt's film *Quand nous étions petits enfants*, we put into action a plan for a series of medium-length documentaries on subjects that got a bit into the social life of the country" (99).¹³ Brandt's work was of enormous importance to Swiss cinema of the 1960s, in a way that is comparable to the importance of the French-language unit of the NFB during the same period. Discussing the 1964 Exposition nationale (for which Tanner had made the documentary *Les Apprentis* as part of the Brandt-produced series "La Suisse s'interroge"), Freddy Buache notes that "I believe that he is the first francophone Swiss filmmaker who was able to make the general public understand the importance and the powers of cinema in modern life. The presence of Henry Brandt's films at the Exposition nationale was a real event" (*Le cinéma suisse*, 13).¹⁴ *Quand nous étions petits enfants* definitely has a lyrical feel to it, being centred mostly around the everyday events of a small village as seen through the eyes of its schoolteacher, Charles Guyot; this is no doubt the reason Buache calls the film a "poème des Travaux" (*ibid.*). Brandt's eye for landscape is very sharp, but he also has a genuinely kinetic sense; a sequence late in the film that documents winter frolicking is especially vividly realized, and a shot where about a dozen ice-skating kids all holding hands glide towards the camera is truly lovely. But as far as sound goes there is very little that is really synchronous; a lot of it is "wild sound" in the style of *Nice Time* or *Les Raquetteurs*, and some of the dialogue that is "synched" is so awkward that it looks to have been done in a studio after shooting.

By pointing this out I certainly do not mean to speak ill of any of these films. They are each fascinating works of documentary, all indicative of a genuinely kinetic visual consciousness. But their sound-image relationships are quite a bit more complex than a simple matter of “you are there,” fly-on-the-wall aesthetics.

It is thus important to take full account of the images of *Une Ville à Chandigarh*'s shifting relationship with its soundtrack. At first, the soundtrack and images work very closely together, but as the film progresses they slowly move apart, only to sometimes come back together again. “This is the tradition of India,” the voice-over states at early in the film. “This is what must both be accepted and change. 360 million Indians live in villages, and that is 80 per cent of the population.” This is over an extreme long shot of a man pulling a plough through a large, dusty field; it is shot in slow motion. So far we seem to be solidly in the realm of the liberal-reformist documentary about the Third World, and there are a lot of images in first part of *Une Ville* that work like this. But even here, matters are more complicated. The shot that follows this one is very different. It is a close-up of an old man at the plough; it is shot with a telephoto lens, so the man and his plough are in very sharp focus but the limited depth of field makes the crops in the background look distant and blurry. The camera pans back and forth a bit as the man walks side to side, and at one point he fills up nearly the entire frame, with only some green blur in the background. Both he and the camera continue to move, and eventually the camera settles on the face of a younger man, who hovers on the edge of the frame, always in motion. The shot is completely at odds with images like the one of the Sikh harvest dance, inasmuch as the long lenses heighten both the closeness of the people in the image and the distance of the other graphic elements, giving the image a semi-abstract quality. Furthermore, despite the pans side to side there is a kind of illusion of stasis here, generated by the fact that people keep coming in and out of frame. This studied and yet non-figurative imagery is also at odds with the parts of this first section of the film where the voice-over is generally used to explain the images. The explanations are in a more impassioned tone of voice than in a conventional documentary and demonstrate a real admiration for the work that is being done here. But they are fairly straightforward as documentary narration. When the film forgoes voice-over, it moves into very lyrical territory, into an aesthetic

pattern that is equally defined by photographic realism and poetry. And at other times, the soundtrack works quite directly against the images. About halfway through the film, the voice-over explains how, even though Indian peasants used to live among their cows, there are no cows allowed in the new city of Chandigarh; there is only a city-owned dairy, at the edge of town. This text is set over a 180-degree pan shot of a small village that is filled equally with cows and people. This shot is followed by a short montage of the countryside as the voice-over explains that there are no shantytowns on the edge of the city because it is all owned by the state. This sort of push and pull between illustration and opposition is what defines more or less the last two thirds of the film.

The transitional part of *Une Ville à Chandigarh* is the sequence in the library. This is comprised of a very long tracking shot and a short montage. As the camera slowly moves up a reading room, keeping patrons in a close-up, the soundtrack is silent. Once we are about halfway up the room, the voice-over simply says that there is something special about libraries, and then goes silent again. But once we are at the end of the room, the film switches to a montage of faces of young women reading, and there is a quote from W.B. Yeats' poem "Long-Legged Fly": "Like a long-legged fly upon the stream / Her mind moves upon the silence." This will become the overall strategy for the film: the use of quotations which have nothing to do with India by way of illuminating some element of the film's visual field.

Berger explained this strategy in his interview with Appignanesi, stating that his desire in writing the text was to eschew conventional description, but that is not exactly what we have in *Une Ville à Chandigarh*. He said there that he and Tanner got to know each other first in London in the 1950s and 60s, and then re-connected a few years later when both were living in Geneva:

At that time he was occasionally making films for Swiss television. One of these was a thirty-minute film about the architecture of Chandigarh in India, which had been built by Le Corbusier, another Swiss. Alain asked me to write the commentary for this film, which I did. The kind of commentary I wrote, although we didn't realize it at the time, was perhaps a little prophetic of some other things we were going to do. Instead of

writing a descriptive commentary about the architecture, what I used were quotations from poets and political theorists which were played in juxtaposition – sometimes ironic, sometimes confirmative – of what was seen on the screen. (299)

The film's commentary integrates text by Rousseau, Yeats, Le Corbusier, Bertolt Brecht, and Aimé Césaire. And as Berger says, sometimes these citations confirm what is on screen, as with the line from Yeats and the montage of young women reading in a library. And sometimes they are ironic; this is true of a sequence towards the end of the film, when the lines "My son asks me should I learn mathematics / What for, I'd like to say / This empire is ending" are placed over a high-angle long shot of a professor holding forth in a lecture hall and close-ups of students attentively listening (the lines are from Brecht's poem "My Young Son Asks Me"). But in other parts of the film there is, quite literally, descriptive commentary about the architecture. In addition to the commentary about 80 per cent of the population living in villages, this is also true of a sequence late in the film composed of a series of zooms in and out of various parts of Le Corbusier's buildings in Chandigarh; the commentary explains the way in which the spaces were built, how they interact with one another, etc.

This mélange of voices on the soundtrack is notable, of course, for its absence of Indian voices; this is actually key to the film's politics. Berger was a strong advocate for many francophone writers from former colonies, and part of the reason for Césaire's presence on the soundtrack was no doubt that Berger was the first to translate his seminal prose-poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* into English. And that work, it is important to recall here, traced a path that wandered all over Africa, the Caribbean, and France; it was an explicitly nomadic analysis of the fate of the displaced black consciousness. And while Tanner was certainly an internationalist, casually rattling off his cinematic inspirations "en France, en Tchécoslovaquie, au Québec, en Pologne, au Brésil, et ailleurs," Berger was, during this period, more passionate still about forging an internationalism that would include the Third World on equal terms. Reporting for the *New Statesman* on the 1958 Venice Biennale, he wrote that:

Among the 500 or so artists on show at Venice there are perhaps a dozen who were possibly born with no more talent than their fellow exhibitors but who encouragingly remind us that art is independent to exactly the same degree as it discloses reality. There are Kewal Soni, Indian Sculptor; Padamsee, Indian painter; Ivan Peries, Ceylonese painter; Raul Anguiano, Mexican follower of Rivera; Brusselmans of Belgium; Ichiro Fukuzara, Japanese expressionist. And then there is the pavilion of the United Arab Republic.¹⁵ Only occasionally do history and art correspond with one another as directly as they do here; but it remains a fact that this pavilion is the most affirmative and vital of all in the 1958 Biennale. (*Permanent Red*, 49)

What is striking here is the casualness with which these nationalities mingle. India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Mexico, Belgium, Japan, and the UAR are, to say the least, in *very* different places in terms of the socio-economic balance of power circa 1950, but they come together in Berger's prose because they have something to tell us about the value of his beloved realist aesthetics. Berger's politics of 1950s and 60s were defined not by nationalist-led liberation movements, then, but by mixtures, by wanderings. His was a Third World politics of Césaire, not Fanon. Thus it is not surprising that a film about India has no Indians on the soundtrack; the cultural condition that he was evoking here went well beyond India, a place that comprises the visual track in its entirety. Tanner's images visualize India as modern in part because it is able to integrate the designs of a European architect into the rhythms of a daily life that is still strongly dominated by tradition. Although he is critical of Berger's text for insufficiently dealing with Indian concepts of life and death, Dimitriu frames this sort of mixture in a basically positive light when he notes that "Throughout the entire film, we see this connection, both formal and semantic, between Indian and European elements. The city is built by and for Indians, but the students wear European clothes. Rupees are converted into francs. The architecture is western, but the music and the sounds are indigenous. This is the optimistic sense of Le Corbusier that is shared by Tanner: it is above all about the search for *joie de vivre*, the aspiration to live in a radiant city, that counts" (20–21).¹⁶ Berger's collage of European and Caribbean voices is part and parcel of the way that the film

evokes this optimistic, distinctly modern and, it bears noting, seminally Indian vision of cultural transformation via mixture.

Overall, then, *Une Ville à Chandigarh* is defined by an exceptionally complex form of montage, the putting together of disparate elements in order to create some sort of synthesis not contained in either element alone. Indeed, the film is defined by a kind of “spirit of montage,” one that is very close to the project laid out in the “Montage” text by Jacques Rivette, Jean Narboni, and Sylvie Pierre that I discussed in the introduction. It is there that Rivette lays out a distinction between two kinds of filmmakers:

... between filmmakers who essentially “make” the film during shooting (and in the preparation for shooting, such as Ford and Renoir), and those for whom this work of writing, or of strategy, and the shooting of footage, is only the accumulation of “matter” (of the material for the film), which is then all put together, and only takes on its shape and makes sense in the editing room (this is as true of Rouch and [Quebec filmmaker Pierre] Perrault as it is for Godard and Eisenstein). (18)¹⁷

Clearly Berger and Tanner are more in the “Rouch and Perrault” camp than the “Godard and Eisenstein” one, being filmmakers who are interested, especially here, in evoking a complex culture in a way that makes the partial, composite nature of the portrait explicit. Furthermore, the film is defined by a marked tension between “le montage à l’intérieur d’une scène ou simplement entre les scènes,” which was the way that Tanner saw the editing of *Le Milieu du monde*. This is definitely how the editing of *Une Ville* operates as well. The film has a lot of straightforward montage sequences – such as the montage of the women’s faces, or that sequence of zooms through Chandigarh’s buildings. This is le montage à l’intérieur d’une scène. The film’s many complex long takes – such as a quite extraordinary sequence where the camera (again using a telephoto lens) holds the dirty face of an older female labourer in a medium close-up as she picks up and drops material on a building site – are in no way incompatible with these sequences. They are elements of a sort of macro-level montage, of montage entre les scenes, as Tanner writes. The film is comprised of juxtaposition between long takes and montage sequences, seemingly disparate elements

that sometimes work together and sometimes are put into opposition. This is, of course, a very clear echo of how the voice-over is interacting with the images. It is also, as Berger said in that 1985 interview, prophetic of the things they would go on to do together.

Mike et l'usage de la science

One of the films that *Une Ville à Chandigarh* anticipates is *Mike et l'usage de la science*, a television documentary about a socially committed nuclear scientist (broadcast 12 March 1968). The film as preserved by TSR has no credits on it, and the fiche on the website mentions only Tanner's name. And even though the filmography in Dimitriu's book says that the film's scenario is by Tanner alone, it also has the credit "Reportage et réalisation: Alain Tanner, avec la participation de John Berger." Dimitriu writes of the film that "We sense here the very strong influence of John Berger, who collaborated on the scenario.... Mike and his spirit come up again, probably twice as much, in several characters in *Jonas*" (24).¹⁸ *Mike et l'usage de la science* is indeed possessed of a spirit that is very Bergerian (to coin a term that I plan to use again!) in that it is political but in a slightly brooding way and is possessed of a very optimistic view of internationalism. It also presents science as something that is tied to worldly concerns, mostly in the way that it represents, via Mike, a restless, optimistic search for truth. Aesthetically *Mike et l'usage de la science* owes relatively little to direct cinema, and the amount of direct address contained in the film hints at Tanner's burgeoning Brechtianism. As my discussion of *Une Ville à Chandigarh* contained some political discussion but presented that film as being significant for mostly aesthetic reasons, I will discuss the aesthetics of *Mike et l'usage de la science* here but mostly present the film as being important for political reasons.

The film opens with a medium shot of two men engaging in a very broad philosophical discussion in heavily accented French. How can we really understand reality? they wonder. Reality, the man on the right says, is only an abstraction, unless you have the POV of God. The man on the right is John Berger, who will again appear in the film's concluding sequence, when the two continue their discussion to include a debate on the value of making a film about issues of science and responsibility. The man on the left is Michael Pence, a nuclear physicist originally from South Africa who renounced his citizenship to become British, before moving, with his wife

and five children, to Geneva. We know this because Pence says all that directly to the camera, in the film's second shot, a medium close-up where he speaks casually and smokes his ever-present pipe.

This is a pretty fair summary of the film's aesthetic pattern overall. There is a bit of handheld camera work when Tanner follows him around his laboratory at the Université de Genève, as well as during a montage sequence that moves between images of him in the lecture hall and shots of one of his younger sons learning his multiplication tables at school. But a very large part of the film is given over to interviews with Mike where he – sometimes with family members – speaks directly to the camera, or to candid but basically static material that, more often than not, uses voice-over rather than (or sometimes in addition to) directly synched sound.

Even though I use the term “film” when discussing *Mike et l'usage de la science* (largely because it was shot on 16 mm), this is, really, the visual pattern of television. Serge Daney, writing nineteen years after *Mike* was broadcast, speculated that “If, finally, TV is our prose (and we'll never speak well enough), cinema no longer has a chance, except in poetry” (90).¹⁹ This poetry-prose split is evocative, especially in the context of a film like *Mike*. There is very little visual poetry, so to speak, in this film. There are some well-executed moving-camera images and the occasional moment of lyricism (a high-angle medium shot of Mike having a mug of tea in bed, for instance), but these are occasional flourishes, the likes of which would be present in any essay written with some sense of style. The film's impact comes mostly from what people say, rather than the images of them saying it. Overall *Mike* is expository rather than suggestive, prosaic rather than poetic. Tanner echoed Daney's sentiments in his “Télé-Aphorismes” essay, although in a much less optimistic tone. “Television is an art of the mouth,” he wrote under the entry for “**Bouche**” [mouth], “and it's not always very appetizing.”²⁰ *Mike et l'usage de la science* is certainly about being an art of the mouth, but this doesn't at all lessen its power to politically engage. If anything, this insistence on the value of talk, and complex, sometimes meandering talk, evinces a patience and seriousness on the part of the viewer that brings us closer to Daney's utopia of “une télé adulte.” Tanner complains that the third, decadent phase of television is when it becomes furniture. Here we can see television in a stage that is closer to vegetation, to wild grass; it's everywhere, and it remains rooted in the landscape from which

it came. “Television rises to the level of ecology,” Daney writes, “because it touches the responsible citizen in us, that is to say, the adult” (189).²¹

So despite the fact that the film isn't much as direct cinema, which Comolli sees as the inherently political form of documentary, it is still as explicitly activist as anything in Berger and Tanner's oeuvre. It wasn't that the two were strangers to political filmmaking at this point. Although the politics of *Une Ville à Chandigarh* are a bit opaque, Tanner, for instance, was making television work in the 1960s that was quite engaged with (often militant) struggles of various sorts. I have in mind here not only the films that I discussed in the introduction – *La Pouvoir dans la rue*, about May '68; *Les Trois belgique*, about linguistic strife in Flanders and Wallonia; *L'Indépendance au loin*, about the Jura conflict, etc. – but also films about Wales and Israel. *L'Identité galloise* (broadcast 15 July 1965) is about Welsh nationalism, and it is very similar to *L'Indépendance au loin* in terms of its even-handedness in the face of Tanner's discernable sympathy. The film has a lot of interviews with key figures in Welsh nationalism; it opens with a shot of the pirate radio station Radio Free Wales (“The Voice of Welsh Freedom!”), has an interview with the militant Harri Williams, has footage of a Welsh-language crèche and a Welsh-medium school (where kids are learning French through Welsh), etc. But Tanner gives almost as much screen time to interviews with miners, people in dance halls, on beaches, etc., who awkwardly express a sense of being Welsh but who have little to no interest in nationalism or separatism. The film seems sympathetic to one side of a political struggle, but it's not really a work of advocacy. Much the same is true of *La Troupe de music-hall* (broadcast 16 May 1969), a film Tanner made about the post-Six-Day-War state (and State) of Israel. Again the work is mostly made up of interviews, but the range of political opinions is greater even than in *L'Identité galloise*. The film seems basically sympathetic to Israeli culture, purely by virtue of the ethnic and political diversity that is on display here (a Sabra dance teacher, a kibbutz-dwelling florist whose parents came from Germany, a woman born in Switzerland where her parents were refugees, etc.). But Tanner also seems critical of the current political situation, by virtue of the fact that he asks everyone he interviews how peace can be made with the Arabs and how the problem of Palestinian refugees can be solved. I use the verb “seem” in discussing both films because it is hard to get a sense of their political positions. In many

ways the films are defined by the experience of widespread indifference coming up against the idealism of an outsider (as Tanner seems to gradually discover that Welsh people aren't all that interested in Welsh nationalism and have only the vaguest sense of what it means to be Welsh) or the realization that a community of highly committed twentysomethings are living in a country that has entered into a likely intractable political quagmire (as young Israeli after young Israeli offers pained, inadequate responses to the refugee crisis which they, as members of a citizen militia explicitly modelled on Switzerland's, are directly involved in).

There is no such sense of defeat in *Mike et l'usage de la science*. The film presents Mike as tireless; we see him working in the lab, talking of being president of the university's staff association, presenting at an anti-apartheid meeting, playing Beethoven on the piano with his youngest son and skiing shirtless with his two older boys after the three of them quaff a beer on the mountaintop. One image is particularly effective in conveying his relentlessness: a tracking shot that follows him through the halls of the university, with a voice-over that has him holding forth about an early job working as a physicist at a factory in Manchester is what brought him to socialism, since it gave him a sense of the economic roots of racial discrimination. There's a lot packed into that shot: a past in South Africa, a decision to become British, a present-day life as a nuclear physicist at one of Europe's leading universities, a commitment to socialism, a realization that economics doesn't tell the whole story but that telling the whole story requires it, etc. It's a key moment in the film because it presents a guy at the peak of his form, and that peak has a lot to do with being a political animal.

Mike's politics as presented in the film are, like those of Janos Lavin in *A Painter of Our Time*, very close to Berger's own. Mike is someone who was restless in the country of his birth and so chose to emigrate to Geneva. Berger made a similar decision in the 1960s, and to Richard Appignanesi's question of why he lives outside of the UK, he replied that "I've lived outside of Britain now for about twenty years, and I had the idea of leaving Britain long before that, but I didn't quite see the opportunity of doing so. The very simple answer is, I feel far more at home on the continent than I do in Britain" (303). This is not an explicitly political reason for migrating to Europe, and so it is interesting to see that the film presents Mike's movement from South Africa to the UK to Geneva in terms that are not only

political. Early in the film Mike recalls (in direct address to the camera) that he renounced his South African citizenship because the political situation had become intolerable. But he also recalls that he came to the UK so he could do *science*. This has a political aspect to it; he tells the camera that many of his friends from South Africa are now in jail or in exile. But during that sequence he also says that living in South Africa faced him with a stark choice: “faire la science ou pas.” Not “prison ou pas” or “exil ou pas”: Mike’s ability to pursue his vocation as a *scientist* was the reason he left South Africa for Britain, eventually coming to Europe, and that very strongly echoes Berger’s own literary blossoming once he left London for Switzerland and then for France.

So this film, which begins and ends with an image of John Berger talking philosophy with Mike, has a discernibly auto-biographical character to it: it is a portrait of a man who wants to reconcile his deep political commitments with his equally powerful commitment to something that seems to transcend earthly concerns at the same time it embodies them. Mike’s commitment to physics is, really, a lot like Berger’s commitment to art and literature. In the lecture that I mentioned earlier as part of a montage sequence with images of his son at school, Mike holds forth on how quantum theory leads both to benefits to humanity and to napalm, both to nuclear energy and to nuclear weapons. What *Mike et l’usage de la science* never shows is Mike discussing how quantum theory leads to more precise or more complex equations. Physics as a purely formal practice holds no interest for him, at least as he is presented by the film. Trying to enunciate what he means by realism, Berger writes in *Permanent Red* that realists “bring into art aspects of nature and life previously ignored or forbidden by the rule-makers. It is in this sense that realists can be opposed to formalists. Formalists are those who use the conventions of their medium (conventions that originally came into being for the purpose of translating aspects of life into art) to keep out or pass over new aspects” (208). *Mike et l’usage de la science* is defined by a desire to explain what aspects of life Mike can translate into physics. A desire for discovery, and a desire for truth, both of which were so crucially important to the idealism of the Enlightenment, is clearly a big part of Berger and Tanner’s task here, just as it is for their version of Mike. We have so little influence, Mike and Berger jointly lament in the closing sequence of the film. Ah, but there is one thing we can

control, Mike says: “L’esprit scientifique.” Understanding that spirit in all its radicalism is what this film is about, and that is a clear continuation of Berger’s desire to recover the parallel radicalism of realist aesthetics.

Docteur B., médecin de campagne

Although it is also ostensibly about a man of science, *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* (broadcast 7 May 1968) is a very different film from *Mike et l’usage de la science*. Part of this is about aesthetics; of all the films I am discussing in this chapter, this is the one that is most clearly an example of direct cinema. But it is also about tone, and about politics. Even though this is a film that Berger officially had nothing to do with, it is the television work of Tanner’s that is closest to work Berger did elsewhere. For *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* is very clearly influenced by the book Berger did with the Swiss photographer Jean Mohr, *A Fortunate Man* (1967), simply in terms of its subject matter but also in terms of its complex formal pattern. This is quite an extraordinary film, certainly the most complex piece of work that Tanner would do until the features he made with Berger (and really, the most complex film he would make until *Le Milieu du monde*). This is due, in no small part, to the way that it presents the push and pull between the community and the individual as part of the same dialectic as that push and pull between tradition and modernity, and yet still manages, as Berger’s book does, to avoid all traces of the folkloric or nostalgic. Politically, it sets the stage for the work that Berger and Tanner would go on to do together in a way that no other film had yet done.

Docteur B. is a portrait of a doctor practising somewhere in the Jura mountains (it is not clear exactly where, although all the cars have Vaud licence plates), and it follows a lot of the then-current patterns of vérité portraiture. There is no voice-over narration (the only non-synchronous sound is of the Doctor’s own voice), and there are no interviews with anyone; whenever someone seems to be directly addressing the camera, it is because they are in some situation where they are addressing an audience and the camera is adopting that point of view. We come to know a lot about the Doctor – he is married with five children, he is fairly religious, he thinks a lot about politics, he speaks Italian well enough to have consultations in that language with a local immigrant family, he is a scout leader (who is committed enough to the cause to wear the very silly uniform at meetings),

etc. Like all portraiture the picture we get here is fragmented and incomplete, but there is a level of detail and an interest in aspects of everyday life (like those scout meetings) such that the viewer has the sensation of knowing the man quite well. This is true despite the fact that we never actually learn his name.

This push and pull between the very precise and the basically hidden – the Jura, but where? We know he’s a scoutmaster but we don’t know his surname? – gives the film the weight of allegory. For what Tanner is portraying here is not really a specific man, a specific doctor, but a way of moving through the world that is committed in a broadly humanist way but also deeply rooted to a specific place, a specific community. There are plenty of aspects of *Docteur B.* that encourage such an allegorical reading, many of them visual. Early in the film, for instance, there is a shot out the window taken from the front seat of the doctor’s VW Bug as it lopes through the incredibly snowy countryside. On the voice-over the Doctor says that he came to medicine “because of an interest in entering into peoples lives and seeing them *chez eux*.”²² As he explains these reasons for his vocation, the camera holds on the windshield, and as the snow gets thicker and thicker, the entire screen eventually goes completely white. It is a moment of verbalized idealism and visual abstraction, and serves as an indication that, despite the fact that this is a documentary, simple representation of reality is not the film’s task. Instead, it is a contemplative study of the relationship between landscape (which here becomes totalizing and pure), personal commitment (which is explained briefly but pithily on the soundtrack) and community (which is implicit here, as we are in this car to follow the Doctor from one *house* call to another). There is a very similar sequence later in the film, where images of his car consumed by blowing snow are accompanied by the Doctor’s voice explaining the degree to which medicine is a balance between art and science.

There’s no doubt that *Docteur B.* is quite consistent with the formal and thematic concerns of 60s *vérité*, but the politics that result from this form are not quite those that Comolli alludes to in the quote that opens this chapter. This film is political, and it is about struggle, but I’m not sure that *Cahiers* watchwords of this period such as *cinéma politique* or *luttant* would really apply here. Instead, the theoretical program that the film is connected to by its realist form is that of John Berger. Here the relevant text is not so

much *Permanent Red* but the work that he was doing with Tanner's fellow citizen of Geneva, the photographer Jean Mohr. Berger and Mohr saw their work together as something that would use art to try to forge more meaningful connections between people, to try to contribute to a world defined by solidarity rather than atomization. Berger spelled this out in an interview he and Mohr gave to *Screen Education's* Paul Willis in 1979:

... individuality is something we all share, and the crucial question is whether we use this individuality in a way which leads to individualism – feelings and emotions of envy, which the consumer society so catastrophically stimulates – or whether one uses it to realise that within one's own individuality, there is precisely the capacity to understand, and sometimes, if that happens to be your craft, to speak for or take pictures for other people's experiences and their individuality. (26)

This desire to see in a picture of an individual some glimpse of other people's experiences, to recover understanding through plunging deeply into people's lives, and doing so *chez eux*, is exactly the subject and the formal strategy of *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*. One aspect that Tanner brings out in his portrait of the Doctor is that he is not some sort of scientist-technician. He is, like Mike Pence, a man of science because he has such a capacity to understand, a capacity he is constantly nurturing and trying to nurture in others. Because while Tanner does show a number of consultations, he also includes sequences where the Doctor gives a talk to teenage boys about sexuality, where he engages in a long talk with a young man about how Swiss youth are increasingly restless with the army and neutrality because they are more able to spend time abroad, and where he tries to get an assembly of pastors' wives to think about the troubles faced by immigrants from Spain, Italy, and Tunisia. These sequences come without any particular segue from the material that is more strictly medical or more strictly personal. Understanding the way that these kinds of subjects blur together is a big part of understanding what kind of individual the Doctor is, a task that Tanner accomplishes without any whiff of what Berger would call individualism.

This dialectic between self and others, between portraiture and community, is at the heart of the text that is my reason for including this film as a “collaboration,” Berger and Mohr’s *A Fortunate Man* (1967). This came out the year before Tanner made *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*, and the similarities between the two works are considerable, especially on the level form. Both *A Fortunate Man* and *Docteur B.* are examples of the sort of realism that Berger had invested so much effort in theorizing and which was also close to the ideals of cinéma vérité: they are rooted in the material details of the everyday, but are very clearly *works*, aesthetic objects that make an analysis of the world as their creators find it, an analysis that they do not seek to hide behind a cloak of hyper-verisimilitude. Furthermore, there is, like in all Berger’s work (as in all direct cinema, as Comolli argues in the quote that opens this chapter), a discernibly political element here, and this is a big part of its influence on Tanner’s film. It is not simply that both *A Fortunate Man* and *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* are about country doctors; both are about the larger political meaning of rural existence, and use the life of a doctor as a way of gaining access to that meaning. About halfway through *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*, there is a medium-long shot of men working in the snowy forest, and on the voice-over is the Doctor explaining how the people in this region are still basically peasants, and as such tend to be very timid. About halfway through *A Fortunate Man*, Berger explains the community he has been portraying like this:

The area as a whole is economically depressed. There are only a few large farms and no large-scale industries. Fewer than half the men work on the land. Most earn their living in small workshops, quarries, a wood-processing factory, a jam factory, a brickworks. They form neither a proletariat nor a traditional rural community. They belong to the Forest and in the surrounding districts they are invariably known as “the foresters.” They are suspicious, independent, tough, poorly educated, low church. They have something of the character once associated with wandering traders like tinkers. (83)

This is, in many ways, the world that Tanner is evoking as well. This becomes clear not only because of the Doctor’s explicit classification of his

community as a peasant one, but also because the film is filled with sequences where we see that his patients are if not suspicious then definitely taciturn, perhaps not poorly educated but defined mostly by menial work, and, in the francophone-protestant Canton Vaud, are a Swiss equivalent of low church. This is a world that by the 1960s was beginning to disappear. As Berger's career went on he became more and more committed to it, eventually moving to a small alpine village in France and writing his "Into Their Labours" trilogy about peasant life in Europe, the first of which was 1979's *Pig Earth*. Tanner's interest in this world of tough, alienated peasantry was more fleeting; in *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* it serves more as a means to explore the nature of commitment and rootedness. It is a world that seems made for a man like the Doctor, a world that allows him to indulge in what Berger (speaking of John Sassell, the doctor at the centre of his book) calls "the part of the gentleman allotted him" (83) when Tanner shows us a shot of him eating fondue, smoking pipes and talking shop with two fellow doctors, but which also allows him to cut an old man's fingernails with a love and commitment similar to what he brings to cutting his son's birthday cake (to summarize a montage sequence that comes at the end of the film).

Docteur B., médecin de campagne's visuals are also strongly influenced by the photographs of *A Fortunate Man*. This is especially true of the images of the doctor's car. Photographs like the one of Sassell talking to an old man as he sits in the driver's seat, stopped along the road (67), have no literal equivalent in *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* but they do give a sense, as do the numerous images of the Doctor driving that Tanner shot from the same passenger's seat POV, that a country doctor spends an inordinate amount of time, and mental energy, in the car. Mohr's image of Sassell's land-rover in the evening winding its way down an impossibly narrow country path (76) is a genuine icon of a country doctor's life and everyday struggles. That image is very close to the film's concluding image, a long shot of the doctor's car driving through the snowy Jura night which turns into a slow zoom that moves towards the car's headlights. Looking at that image of the VW Bug next to the Mohr photo of Sassell's land-rover would almost make you think that Tanner had plucked that still photograph right out of the book and dropped it into his film. Such close correspondence is not surprising, for *A Fortunate Man* is a remarkably cinematic book. This is especially true

of photo sequences like those of a town hall meeting (97–101), where five photographs move the viewer gently through a space and smoothly across an unspecified period of time in a way that is completely consistent with the logic of cinematic *découpage*. It is also true of a series of four photographs of the same man which get gradually closer, and whose depth of field becomes discernibly narrower, as though we were zooming in on him, only to finish with a “rack focus” (actually two images) onto the woman sitting next to the man (107–11). Berger, Mohr, and Tanner are all speaking a very similar language here, on that crosses the boundaries of film, literature, and still photography. They share some of the political possibility that Comolli invests in *vérité*, but to say that both *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* and *A Fortunate Man* are simply different manifestations of “le direct” doesn’t seem quite right. This is not to minimize the degree to which the form of *A Fortunate Man* is influenced by contemporary developments in documentary cinema; that influence is considerable. But really, both *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* and *A Fortunate Man* are examples of a formal pattern consistent with the realism that Berger hoped for in *Permanent Red*, which he tries to define by contrast: “What do the rules of the new art forbid? The answer is staggering: any precise hopeful reference to the objective world. And so the Realist must look at the modern world, which has so unnerved the Formalist, and come to terms with it” (208–9). Looking hopefully at this objective world and coming to terms with it through the aesthetics of cinema, still photography, or written language, is precisely what *A Fortunate Man* and *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* are trying to do.

One question that such an approach inevitably poses is who these works are for. It is clear that, even though both *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* and *A Fortunate Man* are works about tightly knit communities, they are not simply records of those communities made for internal consumption only. Berger spends a lot of time writing in *A Fortunate Man* about the degree to which Sassell is a kind of record-keeper for his community. “With the ‘foresters,’” Berger writes, “he seems like a foreigner who has become, by their request, the clerk of their own records” (83). Elsewhere Berger writes that “He is their own representative. His records will never be offered to any higher judge. He keeps their records so that, from time to time, they can consult them themselves” (103). It is easy to ascribe this sense of Sassell to an autobiographical impulse on Berger’s part, and this is exactly what Geoff

Dyer does in his study of Berger's work. "Sassell in his work is what Berger will become in his," he writes, by way of explaining that very passage from *A Fortunate Man*. "More exactly, Sassell's relationship with his patients prefigures, in some ways, Berger's relationship with the peasants who are to become the subjects of *Pig Earth*" (67). I don't doubt that this was part of Berger's frame of mind when writing his "Into Their Labours" trilogy. But *A Fortunate Man* is about someone who is a clerk of the community's records; it is not itself an example of such record-keeping. This is where we can reverse the hermeneutical flow a bit and allow *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* to clarify *A Fortunate Man*. *Docteur B.* is very much about Swiss society; the village here contains restless young people, neglected old people, alienated immigrants, and comfortable burghers. Tanner presents the Doctor's commitment to the village not as an exercise in parochialism or elder-worship but as evidence of critical engagement with that society; this is why Tanner also not only shows us the Doctor driving in the car with a voice-over that discusses how important it is to help people die well (which is a recurring topic in *A Fortunate Man*) but also shows us the Doctor talking about Third World under-development to earnest-looking Boy Scouts. By allowing the Doctor to speak at such length (usually on the voice-over) Tanner is, in some ways, speaking as "nous," as he believes a documentarian should. But he is speaking as "nous" to a general audience, not simply to "nous autres." Indeed, these worlds as made by Tanner and Berger/Mohr are worlds that they make *for* their protagonists, the Doctor and John Sassell. They are, obviously, not simply given and returned to the viewer untouched. But nor are they records that only the participants will consult themselves; they are being offered, if not exactly to a higher judge, then at least to a distant one in the form of an unknown (and unknowable) viewer. Ivan Maffezzini hits this nail right on the head in his essay on another Berger/Mohr collaboration, the 1982 photo-book *Another Way of Telling*. He writes of those images:

The photos of the life of the woodcutter have the same effect on me as those of Marcel's peasant life. The forest is not a woodcutter's forest. It's a forest made for the woodcutter. An artistic, photographic forest. The photos resemble sequences in a film and not sequences from life – and, anyway, do such sequences even exist in life? (149)²³

These photos in *A Fortunate Man* also resemble sequences in a film: *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*. They resemble that film because both works are possessed of a deeply committed realist aesthetic. That aesthetic, as Berger was at pains to point out in this period, comes with a lot of radical possibility. But it is an *aesthetic*. They are works that speak as “nous,” but they also speak in a subjective and ultimately artificial way. Both are great works of art. They are not great works of record-keeping.

Indeed, one of the ways that the film’s and the book’s aesthetic qualities are made manifest are through their common use of a certain kind of montage aesthetic, one that is fully compatible with the use of realist techniques. In that collective text on “Montage” published in the March 1969 *Cahiers*, Sylvie Pierre tried to define several different kinds of films that used montage. Her second definition is particularly germane, both to *Docteur B.* and *A Fortunate Man*:

Films that don’t seem connected to montage as creative work, in which montage is absent as a sovereign effect, but which, when you look at them, the apparent absence of montage at the creative stage turns out to have been hiding various workings of montage: these include the maximally efficient use of a small number of connections between long takes, or the displacement – through means of cinematic technique other than montage as such – of the gestures of montage (such as *découpage*, as in Straub, or by an articulation from within a shot, as in Mizoguchi or Renoir) (20–21)²⁴

A good example of this sort of montage comes about ten minutes into *Docteur B.*, in a sequence that cuts between the consultation room and the waiting area. Following Pierre, the sequence seems to be defined by a *découpage* that is hiding some montage effects. A medium-long shot where an older man pops off his sweater so the Doctor can listen to his heartbeat has both synch sound and a lot of camera movement, and the shot eventually zooms into a close-up of the Doctor as he puts the stethoscope on the man’s back and then pans right, to frame the patient in close-up. There is also a very brief close-up of the Doctor tapping the man’s back. These shots have over them a voice-over of the Doctor explaining why he chose

to practice in the countryside, and that voice-over bridges this sequence with the images in the waiting room. These images are not long takes at all, although there is plenty of hand-held camera movement, as in the two images in the consultation room. This sequence begins with a man opening the door and walking into the waiting room. The images get gradually closer on the people in the room, until we have series of close-ups of hands: going through a magazine, rubbing fingers nervously, knitting. Finally the sequence closes with the man from the first shot walking through the door into the consultation room. The visual grammar at work here is very close to a sequence of photos of Sassell doing consultations in *A Fortunate Man* (the whole sequence is 42–47). This begins with a shot of Sassell in a dispensary; this is a *very* crowded image, with the camera close to Sassell, who is surrounded by files and peering at a woman through a small window. The photo on the next page is of a man walking through a waiting room door, visible head to toe and slightly blurred as he moves; it was probably taken with a very slow shutter speed. This in turn is followed by a two-page spread of Sassell, cut off at the knees, working with two large metal instruments over a patient on a table; again the slow shutter speed has the effect of blurring Sassell as he moves. The two images that follow this one, though, are very different: a perfectly clear two-shot of Sassell cutting off a cast, and a very close shot of Sassell peering through a lupe and removing something with a tiny needle; that last image is shot with a telephoto lens, and thus has practically no depth of field. As in *Docteur B.*, there is a very real way that this, like other sequences in the book, works on the level of *découpage*, moving the viewer slowly through a space. But as with the varied camera positions and and always-mobile camera of *Docteur B.*, these photographs are different enough in composition and degree of implied movement so as to make them feel more like individual fragments than part of a smooth whole. The sense of the doctor's office as a place where countless individual stories come together without fully meshing is realized in both works via a form of montage that is, basically, being hidden behind a cloak of continuity.

The sequences in both works also have a montage-inflected text-image relationship. Just as there is a voice-over in *Docteur B.* that joins these images but is not simply an explanation of them, this sequence in *A Fortunate Man* has Berger's text explaining some of the aspects of the consultation rooms that we do see ("The consulting rooms do not seem clinical. They

seem lived-in and cozy” [46]) but also some aspects that we don’t (“Once he was putting a syringe deep into a man’s chest: there was little question of pain but it made the man feel bad” [46]). The effect in both cases is to invoke important aspects of a doctor’s life – why one chooses to practice in a given place, how one deals with the odd emotions that accompany bodily violations like needles through chests – seem connected to the spaces in which they work. But the fact that there is a slight disconnect here, the fact that we are not actually seeing the things about which the text speaks, also makes it clear that such problems go beyond what happens in the doctor’s office, go beyond what can be accomplished through the everyday routines of the profession. That this is being communicated not through what is said in any image or piece of text but in the *conflict* between image and text is indicative not only of Berger and Tanner’s shared Marxist sensibilities (for montage, based in dialectics as it is, has impeccable Marxist credentials), but also of their shared belief in the fundamental complexity of the ways that people interact with their communities. Sassell and the Doctor are both presented representatives of medicine, as exemplary of a form of committed professionalism. But sequences like these remind the viewer that there is just as much meaning in the gaps or divergences in representation, just as much to be gained by understanding how Sassell and the Doctor are not directly presented in the film. Montage may be more or less absent as a “sovereign effect” in these works (although there are a few montage sequences in *Docteur B.*), but that spirit of critical inquiry into both presence and absence that so characterizes the relationship that montage cultivates with its reader is a central aspect of both *A Fortunate Man* and *Docteur B.*

For all the idealism, both political and formal, that these works contain, the story of each has something of an unhappy ending, one that is linked to some of the sociological significance of cinéma vérité. Dyer writes that “*As if* overwhelmed by the shadows cast by the urgent imperatives by which he lived his life, *as if* tormented by the uncertainties of Berger’s closing pages, Sassell killed himself” (70). Dyer links this to the only passage in *A Fortunate Man* where Berger acknowledges his presence explicitly, where he recalls how “when he was unaware of my presence, I saw him weep, walking across a field away from a house where a young patient was dying” (112). Tanner identified a very similar ethical dilemma at the core of *Docteur B., médecin de campagne*. His first feature film, *Charles mort ou vif*, tells the story

of a rich industrialist who, after being interviewed for a television program, has something of an existential crisis and abandons his life for the bohemian instability of the Jura mountains. In an interview with the *Cahiers du cinéma*'s Michel Delahaye and two other writers upon the release of that film, Tanner had the following exchange about the series that *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* was made for, "Aujourd'hui":

Cahiers: Does that exist, a TV series like the one you show in *Charles mort ou vif*?

Tanner: It exists, but it's not exactly the same thing. I've already made four portraits for that series. As for the rest, the idea, the starting place for the film – inasmuch as the rest of it is very different – it's a real experience. One of the portraits was of a country doctor: television arrived in the guy's life, and the fact was that he thought of himself in some ways as a sort of spokesman for the medical profession. We stayed with him for a fortnight, and we spoke at great length. That was sort of a breaking point in his life. He sort of rethought things, and having done the show marked him profoundly. Afterwards he fell into a fairly serious nervous depression. (29)²⁵

Both of these extra-cinematic misfortunes speak to one of the best known quandaries of early vérité filmmaking: the effect that a filmmaker's presence has on the lives of "civilians," people otherwise not involved in filmmaking and not likely to be fully aware of its power. Now, Sassell and the Doctor were grown-ups when they got involved with Berger and Tanner, and no doubt that they knew more or less what they were getting themselves into. But both projects remain haunted by the extra-textual reality of the affect that the process of filmmaking – the technology of realism, basically – had on what Berger calls "the objective world."

For a pre-history of the collaboration

Although he doesn't use the words "objective world," Roland Barthes has written about a realist aesthetic in ways that are close to Berger's writings

on realism and, more important for our purposes here, close to the way in which these Berger and Tanner documentaries approach the task of realist aesthetics. Writing in his short text *Leçon*, Barthes could very well be explaining the way that cinéma vérité, at its best moments, respects the look and feel of the material world at the same time that it presents itself as fully cinematic, fully aestheticized. Invoking the great French food writer Curnonsky, Barthes recalls his famous maxim that “in cooking ‘things must taste like what they are.’ In the regime of knowledge, for things to become what they are, we need that ingredient, that salt of words. It’s the taste of words that makes for deep, fecund knowledge” (21).²⁶ Giving images and words their taste is, for Berger and Tanner, not simply a matter of serving experience up raw. But nor is this a matter of smothering representation with formal embellishment. Rather, their works present things for what they are because of the aesthetic and thematic ingredients they add: cultural mixture, political idealism, iconicity, montage. This may seem the opposite of what a de-naturalizing, Brechtian aesthetic would call for, but of course it’s not at all. Barthes, like Brecht before him, respected art that tried to present the world for what is was. But he respected *art* that did that, and understood, just as Barthes did, that art has formal elements that can be of a lot of use in helping the viewer see the world as it is. All of Berger and Tanner’s work should be via this Barthesian/Brechtian approach to realism: together they made films about the material realities of their societies, but they made those films using aesthetic patterns that, like the gentle application of some spices or the tactful placement of a Kurt Weill song, lead the viewer to a knowledge whose emotional resonance makes it truly deep, truly fecund. This aestheticization/realist tension is more *explicitly* present in these documentaries than in any other films they made together.

So although this early work may seem minor in comparison to the three features that Berger and Tanner did together, it contains a great deal that makes it both important in its own right and significant as a predictor of the concerns of *La Salamandre*, *Le Milieu du monde*, and *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l’an 2000*. The search for new sound-image relationships; the difficulty of reconciling science, education, and political activism; the relationship between landscape, community, and commitment: these are central issues for all three features Berger and Tanner made together and they are dealt with in these three early works in ways that are admirably rigorous and,

as befitting a curious, searching sensibility, basically unresolved. It would be easy to see the films as curiosities on the basis of their length or their pedigrees as commissioned works. But film history tends to be overly exclusionary on bases like this; too much criticism is written on the implicit assumption that the only real filmmaking is when someone sets to making ninety-minute fiction film. *Une Ville à Chandigarh*, *Mike et l'usage de la science*, and *Docteur B., médecin de campagne* are important contributions both to documentary cinema during a time of aesthetic transition and hybridity and should be seen as important both for Berger and Tanner's work together and for European political art of the 1960s.

Notes

- 1 “Conditions de travail et pressions font que le direct est en situation politique, même si la plupart des films qui le pratiquent ne se veulent pas, ou ne sont pas au premier chef des films politiques.”
- 2 “Un journaliste parle même de Marcel Bezençon, alors directeur de la SSR, comme du « huitième Conseiller fédéral »”. Although Switzerland has a president, her role is largely ceremonial; technically she is “Président du conseil fédéral,” a seven-member body that is drawn from the coalition of the ruling parties, and which exercises actual executive power.
- 3 “Les programmes diffusés par la SSR doivent défendre et développer les valeurs culturelles du pays et contribuer à la formation spirituelle, morale, religieuse civique et artistique des auditeurs et téléspectateurs.... Les programmes doivent servir l’intérêt du pays, renforcer l’union et la concorde nationales et contribuer à la compréhension internationale.”
- 4 “En Suisse romande, les deux grands navires amiraux de l’information que sont CONTINENTS SANS VISA, puis TEMPS PRÉSENT rendent compte de réalités internationales mal connues tout en sensibilisant l’opinion à la brutalité des rapports Nord-Sud. CONTINENTS SANS VISA aborde également certains sujets chauds avec une émission sur le secret bancaire en 1964, ainsi qu’un « Dossier », réalisé par Alain Tanner, consacré à « Louvrier suisse » (19 mai 1966). Une émission, au caractère militant affirmé, qui, au vu des vagues suscitées, sera suivie par un programme similaire sur « Le paysan suisse », puis, une année après, sur « Le patron suisse ».”
- 5 “... l’amour impossible entre un cinéaste qui avait besoin de créer des images en liberté, pas forcément du documentaire, et une institution qui en produisait mais qui subissait les lois de la rationalisation, donc de la bureaucratisation.”
- 6 “**Phases.** Il y a eu trois phases dans le développement de la télévision et trois façons de la regarder. La première, c’était une époque de créativité, de travail et d’un peu de croyance. La seconde, c’était la découverte de ce qu’est vraiment la télévision, accompagnée d’une boulimie perverse et d’une jouissance au troisième degré, jusqu’à la connaissance – et rapide épuisement de cette connaissance – des codes et des signes. La troisième c’est maintenant : le meuble, avec un peu de football et quelques films anciens le soir.”
- 7 “Je n’avais pas tourné un film documentaire depuis une trentaine d’années. Dans la fiction, on dit « je » et cela vous donne un plus grand espace de liberté. En disant « je », on n’a de comptes à rendre qu’à soi-même et aux spectateurs. Dans le documentaire, on dit « eux » et on a des comptes à leur rendre à eux, on n’est pas libre de se servir d’eux, sans leur accord et leur participation. Mais il ne faut pas faire le film sur eux, cela vous place au-dessus et ce n’est pas la bonne position. Il faut être avec eux, et que ce « eux » se transforme en « nous ». Ça, c’est la bonne place pour travailler le documentaire.”

- 8 “La télévision, c’était le début de l’expérience du son synchrone, de la camera à la main, en filigrane des premières expériences de Jean Rouch, par exemple. La fiction ne m’attirait pas et les dramatiques ne m’intéressait pas de tout.” An excellent English-language introduction to Rouch’s work can be found in Joram ten Brink, ed., *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007). Rouch’s own writings on cinema and ethnography have been translated and collected as Jean Rouch, *Ciné-Ethnography*, Steven Field, ed. and trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). In French, an excellent introduction can be found in *CinémAction* 17 (1981), a special issue edited by René Prédal called “Jean Rouch, un griot gaulois.”
- 9 “En France, celui que je préfère aujourd’hui : Jean Rouch, il est à la pointe des recherches pour un langage nouveau et la découverte de la vérité.”
- 10 “La division traditionnelle entre « action à filmer » et « action de filmer » se résout en « action filmée ».”
- 11 “On a beau vouloir respecter ce document, on ne peut pas éviter de le **fabriquer**. Il ne préexiste pas au reportage, mais en est le produit.”
- 12 “Nous avons tourné *Les Apprentis* d’une façon tout à fait anachronique (mais ces techniques [du direct] n’existaient pas chez nous) avec une grosse caméra blimp 35mm alors que c’était le sujet idéal pour une technique léger.”
- 13 “Inspiré par expérience anglaise du « Free Cinema » et le film de Brandt *Quand nous étions petits enfants*,
- nous avons mis sur pied un projet d’une série de moyens métrages documentaires sur des sujets qui mordaient un peu dans la vie sociale du pays.”
- 14 “Par la suite le cinéaste n’a cessé d’importance et je crois qu’il est le premier réalisateur romand qui soit parvenue à faire comprendre à un large public l’importance et les pouvoirs du cinéma dans la vie moderne. La présence des films de Henri Brandt à l’Exposition nationale fut un véritable événement.”
- 15 The United Arab Republic was a relatively short-lived union between Egypt and Syria; its capital was Cairo and its only president was Gamal Abdel-Nasser. It lasted from 1958 to 1961, although Egypt kept the name even after Syria had left the union. It was a classic Nasser-era endeavour, inasmuch as it was an explicitly pan-Arab project that had a shifting relationship with the USSR and made the United States and British governments exceedingly nervous.
- 16 “Pendant tout le film, nous retrouvons ce rapport, formel et sémantique, entre éléments européens et éléments indiens. La ville est construite par les Indiens et pour eux, mais les étudiants portent des habits européens. Les ruppies [*sic*] sont convertis en francs. L’architecture est occidentale, mais la musique et les sons indigènes. Le côté optimiste de Le Corbusier est partagé par Tanner : c’est surtout la recherche de la joie de vivre, l’aspiration à vivre dans une cité radieuse, qui comptait.”
- 17 “... entre les cinéastes qui « font » le film essentiellement au tournage (et à la préparation de ce tournage : par exemple, donc, Ford et Renoir), et

ceux qui pour ce travail de l'écriture, ou de la *stratégie*, et de la prise de vues n'est que l'accumulation d'une « matière » (d'un matériel), qui est ensuite toute remise en cause, et ne prend son ordre et son sens que dans la salle de montage (c'est aussi bien Rouch et Perrault que Godard et Eisenstein)."

- 18 "On y sent l'influence très forte de John Berger qui a collaboré au scénario.... Mike et son esprit se retrouvent, probablement dédoublés, dans plusieurs personnages de *Jonas*."
- 19 "Si enfin la télé est notre prose (et on ne parlera jamais assez bien), le cinéma n'a plus de chance que dans la poésie."
- 20 "La télévision est un art de la bouche, et ça n'est pas toujours ragoûtant."
- 21 "La télé relevait de l'écologie parce qu'elle touchait en nous le citoyen responsable, c'est-à-dire l'adulte."
- 22 "Pour un goût d'entrer dans les vies des gens et de les voir chez eux."
- 23 "Les photos de la vie du bûcheron me font le même effet que celles de la vie paysanne de Marcel. La forêt n'est pas la forêt d'un bûcheron. C'est une forêt faite pour le bûcheron. Une forêt artistique, photographique. Les photos ressemblent aux séquences d'un film et pas à celles d'une vie – et, d'ailleurs, est-ce qu'il existe quelque chose comme des séquences de la vie?"
- 24 "Les films qui ne semblent pas se situer par rapport au montage comme travail créateur, dans lesquels le montage est absent comme effet souverain, mais où, on l'a vu, l'absence apparente du montage au

stade créateur peut cacher diverses manœuvres de montage : soit l'utilisation, au maximum de leur efficacité, d'un petit nombre de liaisons entre les plans longs, soit le déplacement sur d'autres charnières de la combinatoire filmique que celles du montage proprement dit, des gestes du montage (par le découpage – voir Straub –, par l'articulation à l'intérieur même du plan – voir Mizoguchi or Renoir)."

- 25 "*Cabiers* : Ca existe, une série TV comme celle que vos montrez dans « Charles » ?

Tanner : Ça existe, mais ce n'est pas tout à fait la même chose. J'ai fait déjà quatre portraits dans cette série. Et du reste, l'idée, le point de départ du film – bien que tout le reste soit très différent – c'est une expérience réelle, un de ces portraits qui était celui d'un médecin de campagne : il y a eu l'arrivée de la télévision dans la vie de cette homme, et le fait qu'il s'est estimé à certains égards un peu comme le porte-parole du corps médical. Nous sommes restés quinze jours chez lui, nous avons parlé très longuement. Cela a fait comme une sorte de cassure dans sa vie. Il s'est repensé en quelque sorte, et le fait de faire l'émission l'a marqué très profondément. Par la suite il a fait une dépression nerveuse assez grave."

- 26 "Curnonski disait qu'en cuisine il faut que « les choses aient le goût de ce qu'elles sont ». Dans l'ordre du savoir, pour que les choses deviennent ce qu'elles sont, ce qu'elles été, il y faut cet ingrédient, le sel des mots. C'est ce goût des mots qui fait le savoir profond, fécond."

