



REVISIONING EUROPE: THE FILMS OF JOHN BERGER AND ALAIN TANNER

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LA SALAMANDRE

“Pangloss taught metaphysical-theologico-cosmologo-nigo-logy. He proved incontestably that there is no effect without a cause, and that in this best of all possible worlds, his lordship’s country seat was the most beautiful of mansions and her ladyship the best of all possible ladyships” – *Candide* (20)¹

“All history is contemporary history: not in the ordinary sense of the word, where contemporary history means the history of the comparatively recent past, but in the strict sense: the consciousness of one’s own activity as one actually performs it. History is thus the self-knowledge of the living mind. For even when the events which the historian studies are events that happened in the distant past, the condition of their being historically known is that they should vibrate in the historian’s mind.” – John Berger, *G* (54)

In a classic example of Parisian parochialism, Gérard Legrand’s basically positive review of *La Salamandre* that appeared in the French film magazine *Positif* (the arch-rival of the *Cahiers du cinéma* and strongly critical of the French New Wave) stated that “What bothered me about this film from the start is that it (already) had the scent of the anachronistic. Alain Tanner has remade a for sure better version of the ‘New Wave’” (26).² It’s not hard to see what elements of the film would lead a critic in this direction; not only is it shot, using lots of handheld cameras and long takes, on location in

the metropolis of Geneva, but it even stars Bulle Ogier, who had just a few years earlier made a huge splash in Jacques Rivette's *L'Amour fou* (1969). But I would argue that the film shares relatively little with the New Wave of the 1960s, and that this goes well beyond what Legrand patronizingly refers to as "une « romanité » locale" or "a local 'French-Swiss-ness'" (26). Instead, *La Salamandre* is an essay on the difficulty of communication, be it on the level of interpersonal relations, mass media representations, or cinematic constructions. In this way it is a seminally modern film; it is about the same thing that forms it, which is the encroachment of technology and manipulation into everyday life. It is ostensibly a story about Rosemonde, who two young writers, the freelance journalist Pierre and the more bohemian Paul, are trying to understand so they can write a television script about her having shot her petit-bourgeois uncle with his own army rifle. But as in Yeats's formulation, things quickly fall apart; the centres of stable knowledge and clear communication do not hold. Tanner and Berger render this "falling apart" in both narrative and formal terms, using devices such as complex and unresolved narrative elements, sequence shots, disembodied voice-over, and so on. This goes well beyond anything that was going on *chez* Truffaut or Rohmer, and brings us a lot closer to what was going on in the late 1960s and early 1970s Godard. That is a period of his work that saw Godard turning very clearly away from the legacy of the New Wave (a turning that was signalled, in no small part, by his moving first to the French border town of Grenoble and eventually settling in Rolle, Switzerland) and towards a use of film language that was both explicitly political and highly self-aware. I alluded to this in the previous chapter, somewhat dismissively mentioning his "Groupe Dziga Vertov" films, which I do indeed see as not terribly successful (despite my great admiration for the post-new wave work of Godard, especially his collaborations with Anne-Marie Miéville). This is the context in which *La Salamandre* belongs, and in this light it can be seen not only as cutting-edge but also as very rigorously conceived.

Tanner has defined modernity in art more or less in terms of self-conscious form, something that was also quite important to Berger during this period. He wrote in *Ciné-mélanges* that

I'm recalling from memory Octavio Paz, who had defined what modernity is in art very well. For him, modernity was first of

all at the interior of a work; in the way it works and its very tissues, it launched a critique of its own means of expression, be it literature, painting or cinema, and this critical position would transform both the texture and the finished product. From Paz, it's clear that you can only move towards Brecht. (74)³

I believe Tanner has in mind here Paz's 1990 Nobel Prize address, wherein he said that "Modernity is the spearhead of historical movement, the incarnation of evolution or revolution, the two faces of progress." Paz went on in that speech to say that "I returned to the source and discovered that modernity is not outside but within us. It is today and the most ancient antiquity; it is tomorrow and the beginning of the world; it is a thousand years old and yet newborn."⁴ This view of modernity as something that is the product of a deep dialectic between present and past, a dialectic that is, as Paz says, *adentro de nosotros*, brings us to Brecht inasmuch as both writers see progress as something that engages with and is inseparably linked to history, not something that moves away from it (hence Brecht's attachment to, say, dance-hall musicals). This movement towards Brecht is testament to the importance that Tanner gives to a form that is self-aware; something very similar was going on in Berger's work at this time. When I spoke to him on the phone on 20 October 2009, Berger was at pains to point out that at the time he began collaborating with Tanner, he was working on his 1972 novel *G*. This was probably his most experimental novel up to that point (and it remains one of his more formally eccentric works), a point that Berger himself made to Richard Appignanesi when he explained why he and Tanner didn't work together any more: "Several years previously [to the end of their collaboration after 1976's *Jonas*], I had written the novel *G*, which is an experimental work in terms of its narrative. But after *G*, the next fiction work I wrote, *Pig Earth*, was about peasants, and in writing this I found it necessary to return to a much more traditional form of narrative" (306). With *Pig Earth* Berger was, in many ways, moving away from modernity, and felt a parallel need to move away from self-critical form; starting at Paz, Berger moved *away* from Brecht, and towards Ramuz. For Tanner, though, the Brechtian imperative remained central and offered a way to redeem two of his films that felt dated to him. He wrote in *Ciné-mêlanges* that "I have, for a long time, put certain films out of my mind, because I find

them too discursive, head to toe connected to the present. I'm thinking of *La Salamandre* or *Jonas Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*. I'd bet that if they resurface, it'll be above all because they are completely anchored in modernity" (75).⁵ This is much more true of *La Salamandre* than it is of *Jonas*, for it is this earlier film that has, *dans son fonctionnement et son tissu même*, the sense that communication is an inherently thorny process and is being made all the more so by the evolution of bourgeois, capitalist societies like that of Switzerland's. *La Salamandre* is significant for the Berger-Tanner collaboration not only because it is their first narrative-feature film, but also because it lays out certain thematic and, just as importantly, formal characteristics that mark it as a critique of modernity that is unmistakably launched from the inside. It is not a nostalgic lament against modernity, nor a bohemian jam session that tries to stand apart from it. Rather, it is an alternative vision of that cultural condition, a vision that is both deeply critical of the state of western capitalist societies but is also often lyrically optimistic about what resistance to those societies can look like.

These formal patterns to which I allude are not as fully, meticulously executed as they are in *Le Milieu du monde*, and *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000*, but they are present. Early on, *La Salamandre* introduces an off-screen commentator, who is not exactly a narrator but whose voice is completely non-diegetic. This voice first appears when Paul is riding his mo-ped from his house in the country down to Geneva to begin work on his profile of Rosemonde. It explains a bit about Paul's life and motivations, gives some economic details of his existence, and specifies the setting of the film. But it doesn't do this in a cold, factual way; the setting, for example, is explained this way: "Here we are at the extreme west of the country, two steps to the border, and Switzerland seems far behind. We turn our backs on her" (*L'Avant-scène cinéma*, 10).⁶ This is an echo of the kind of narrative interruptions that Berger would insert into *G*, but in that novel this extra-diegetic voice is not disembodied; it is clearly Berger's own, and it is frequently about the problems he is having writing the novel, set in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Europe. "I cannot continue this account of the eleven-year-old boy in Milan in 6 May 1898," he writes by way of concluding a depiction of the rioting that presaged the failed Milanese revolution of the turn of the century. "From this point on, everything I write will either converge on a final full stop or else disperse so widely that it will

become incoherent” (77). Following a passage depicting, in a prose-poem kind of way, a sexual encounter, he recalls coming out of a Paris laundromat in the morning: “Every personal desire, preference or hope has become an inconvenience. I wait at the bus stop. The waving red indicator of the Paris bus, as it turns the corner, is like a brand taken from a fire. At this moment I begin to doubt the value of poems about sex” (110). The narrator of Berger’s novel *G* is a character: an autobiographical one, but a character nevertheless, and one who makes the borders between diegetic and non-diegetic basically meaningless.

That’s not quite what’s going on with the narrator in Berger’s scenario *La Salamandre*. The grain of the narrator’s voice, to borrow Roland Barthes’ famous image, is nowhere near as pronounced, and her tone is nowhere near as sceptical. And yet, there is some crucial information in this commentary, and the narrator’s tone is often an ironic one. This is most evident midway through the film, when the narrator explains why Paul thinks of Rosemonde as “La salamandre”: “Paul wrote in his pad: ‘The Salamander is a pretty little animal, part of the lizard family. It’s black with yellow-orange spots. The Salamander is venomous. It’s not afraid of fire and can walk right through the flames without getting burned’” (*L’Avant-scène cinéma*, 31).⁷ The extra-diegetic material helps to break the illusion of narrative in a way that is comparable to *G*, but the spirit of criticism and scepticism that such breaking is supposed to inspire is left to the viewer, rather than contained in the text itself. Arguably this is actually the more progressive, non-manipulative strategy, since the viewer of *La Salamandre* is essentially being given a lot of detail and some hints at a world-view (such as the sense that to go out into the border country is to turn your back on Switzerland, or that Rosemonde’s brashness is like someone who walks through fire without getting burned), whereas the reader of *G* is being given actual criticism, explicit scepticism about the contours of specific passages in the novel. The extra-diegetic voice-overs in Berger and Tanner’s later films will become a bit more aggressive about positing a specific analysis of the film ideological project (that’s most true of *Le Milieu du monde*, although it’s true of *Jonas* too), but they will still not be quite the same as what is going on in *G*. In all of this work, though, the narrative is frequently interrupted in a way that insists that narrative and spectacle be understood for what they are. Michael Tarantino has a similar sense of Berger’s interest in self-reflexive forms,

writing that “His point of view attempts to close the distance between the writer as observer/audience and the writer as the object of perception, the source of the original text. When translated into fictional/narrative terms, the result is an increased perception in the role of narration itself” (“The Voice Off-Screen,” 35). This strategy of disjuncture between the visual and aural fields in the name of synthesizing something new, and to do so in a way that forces the viewer to do some work is dear to the heart of theorists of montage. This was also quite visible in *Une Ville à Chandigarh*, and Tarantino also notes this as being important to the films they would go on to do together: “Ultimately the film [*Une Ville à Chandigarh*] resides on the suspicion of that which is apparent, a suspicion which is used to expose certain underlying ramifications. In this case, the methods of the documentary would foreshadow the approach to the fictional narrative” (“The Voice Off-Screen,” 34). This is certainly true of the sound-image relationship of *La Salamandre*, and the commentary is playful about this from the beginning. As Paul rolls into Geneva on his mo-ped, that voice-over says “Despite certain appearances, in which you must never trust, Paul was neither a house painter nor a singer, but a writer” (*L’Avant-scène cinéma*, 10).⁸

But as Jim Leach notes, this engagement with this ethic of montage via an aesthetic of disparate fragments coming together does not mean that Tanner accepts the inherent conflict between montage and sequence shots. Something very similar to the way *La Salamandre* uses extra-diegetic voice-over is true of the film’s use of long takes. I mentioned in the introduction the degree to which Tanner seems to be in a kind of argument with André Bazin over the meaning and possibilities of the long take and their relationship with montage and *découpage*. The editing patterns of *La Salamandre* echo these arguments, although as with the use of extra-diegetic voice-over, this self-conscious aesthetic gesture is present here in a fairly gentle, almost introductory way, and will become a lot more rigorous in later films. Tanner explained his sense of the duality of the long-take aesthetic to Lenny Rubenstein, saying that:

What we have tried to do, by not cutting within a sequence, is to give back to a scene its reality. There is a paradox in this, since if you don’t cut, instead of it being more real which it should be, in fact you are getting unreal because of the traditions in the eye of

the spectator. The basis of the language of my films is the theory of alienation, and by giving a shot its full value, strength and importance, an alienation effect is caused. If you don't cut, you see everything differently. (99)

This is very close to Roland Barthes' sense of the paradox of realist aesthetics, which he spelled out in his 1968 essay "L'Effet de réel": "realist literature is, no doubt, narrative, but this is because the realism in it is only marginal, erratic, confined to the 'details,' and because the most realist story that you could imagine would develop along non-realist lines" (88).⁹ We can very clearly see this in sequence shots like the one where Pierre takes Rosemonde to a café. They come in, find a table, Rosemonde goes over to the jukebox and drops in coin, listens for a moment, rejoins Pierre at the table, and lets him order for her. The shot lasts about a minute and a half; Rosemonde is at some point framed first in a medium-long shot, then medium close-up, and then medium shot. The effect is definitely one of time stretching out, and of the viewer becoming highly aware of the small space of the café and the way that Rosemonde moves through it. Moreover, the sound-image relationship is very eccentric; the music isn't clearly diegetic or non-diegetic, since it is on the soundtrack before Rosemonde goes over to put her coin in the jukebox. Despite these eccentricities, though, the sequence is bookended by sequences that use *découpage* of one form or another to move around a space: it is preceded by a sequence in Pierre's car that alternates close-ups of them both as they talk, and it is followed by a sequence in Pierre's apartment which begins with a fairly long take but shifts to shot/reverse-shot as Pierre photographs her. Tanner uses long takes throughout *La Salamandre*, and he always uses them to expressive effect. But they are one element of the cinematic toolbox; they do not predominate, and indeed set the critical-ideological tone, to quite the degree that they do in *Le Milieu du monde* or even *Jonas*.

In addition to frequently drawing on a self-consciously slow and deliberate pattern of long takes, *La Salamandre* is also quite self-conscious at the level of subject matter; it is a film about the impossibility of knowing someone and as a film it has narrative situations that constantly reinforce the constructed, subjective quality of all knowledge. The first time Paul and Pierre meet to discuss how they will approach the writing of the television

script about Rosemonde's life, Paul spins an elaborate tale about her being from a giant family, deep in the country, and suffering various deprivations. Pierre and Paul then have the following exchange:

Paul: Not bad, that story. I'll stick around. What do you think?

Pierre: It's not bad, but there's a little problem all the same.

Paul: Which is?

Pierre: What's all that got to do with reality?

Paul: Hey, I've been talking to you about reality for the last five minutes. Except for maybe a few details, I feel like I've already put in a good day's work.

Pierre: Sure, you've put in a good day's work, but it's also quite possible that you've been dreaming. I don't really see why we need to first go with your imagination when the story really happened. The girl exists, and the uncle too. They're here, in some way. It's reality that interests me... (*insistent*) ... things! You have to start from there, and understand,... touch what you can touch. (*Paul tries to interrupt.*) No, you mess around afterwards. You have to start with an inquiry.

Paul (gruffly): I'm not a cop.

Pierre: A journalistic inquiry, bonehead!

Paul (same tone): I'm not a journalist.

(*L'Avant-scène cinéma*, 12)¹⁰

One of the most telling of the little jokes in this sequence is Paul's easy equation of being a cop with being a journalist. Both, in his view, exercise an authority (which he likely sees as illegitimate) largely by insisting on the existence of, and more importantly our access to, a single vision of events. Tarantino argues that this is the way Berger sees history in *G*, saying that for Berger, "To write as if all words were a priori facts is to adopt a coercive stance towards one's audience" ("The Voice Off-Screen," 37). *La Salamandre* is practically militant in its rejection of this sort of coercion. This is not a matter of a simple-minded relativism; it is important to distinguish between a rejection of the existence of physical reality and an insistence that we do not have pure, unfiltered access to that reality. This, really, is what Berger and Tanner are making clear in *La Salamandre*. The girl exists: her uncle

too. Berger and Tanner show them to be *there*, and thus they exert some control on what Pierre and Paul can do with them. We see them exerting this control throughout the film: when Pierre interviews the uncle shortly after this exchange, but more importantly, when Rosemonde manipulates and confuses Pierre and Paul throughout the film. Pierre and Paul are trying to be the authors of Rosemonde's life, and as authors they are not only free to act creatively on that text but they really can't do anything else. But what they discover is what all writers eventually discover: before too long, that text starts acting on them. Rosemonde exerts some control on what can be done with her.

I allude here to the 1981 debate between Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser in the pages of *Diacritics*. "The object is not purely perceived, but it is *there*," Iser wrote, in response to Fish's criticism of his approach to interpretation (specifically his 1978 book *The Act of Reading*). "And because it is there it exerts some control on what we can do with it" (87, italics his). *La Salamandre* is, basically, about Pierre and Paul's attempt to interpret Rosemonde; the research they do is mostly a matter of interviews with Rosemonde (the text) and her family and friends (who are a kind of paratext, as Voltaire's celebrated volumes of correspondence are for someone writing a television script based on *Candide*). Coming to grips with her is difficult, and there are times in the film when it seems that Pierre and Paul will never even be able to settle whether Rosemonde really shot her uncle, let alone understand what really makes her tick. But the film ends with some basic facts established, some skeleton to the text. In a medium shot of Pierre, Paul, and Rosemonde, Paul asks her, simply, "Was it you, Rosemonde, who shot your uncle?" She replies, just as simply, "Oui, c'est moi." And she goes on to say:

But I didn't really want to, I don't know... It just happened like that, in a fit of rage. I couldn't take him, the old jerk... he never stopped bugging me. He always wanted me to work ... even when there was nothing to do. Like in the army (*silence*). He never stopped his moaning, his lecturing. I was always afraid of getting carried away, of doing something stupid. I don't know what to do... (*L'Avant-scène cinéma*, 36)¹¹

La Salamandre (Alain
Tanner, 1971). SVO
Cine. Pictured: Bulle
Ogier and Jean-Luc
Bideau. Photo from
The Kobal Collection/
Art Resource, NY.

image not available

This is where the matter of interpretation enters into the picture, and the film makes no bones about its completely indeterminate nature. Why Rosemonde did what she did, and what it means for her own life or for the life in a place where life is often defined like life in the army, remains a matter for ongoing debate and is fundamentally unclear, even for the ostensible author of these events, Rosemonde herself. But there is, finally, some basis of fact. She shot her uncle. Oui, c'est moi.

Rosemonde as an active force in the writing of her own life is a key part of the film's narrative and has strong ties to Berger's work elsewhere. During the 1960s and 70s especially Berger wrote frequently about issues of sexual representation. The signature works of criticism there are *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (1965) and *Ways of Seeing* (1972), both of which deal extensively with the ways that changes in the ideology and technology of painting led to the rise of an aesthetic where artists presented women as a proxy for property. (In *Ways of Seeing* Berger argues that the rise of oil painting is particularly important for this ideological shift; in *Success and Failure of Picasso* it is the twentieth-century emergence of art as pure investment that Berger focuses on.) The signature work of fiction on this front, though, is *G* (published in 1972, the year after the release of *La Salamandre*), and there is a great deal there that connects with Rosemonde's place in the narrative as someone who is desired precisely because she cannot be represented. Shifting into a didactic voice, Berger writes of nineteenth-century European women:

Men surveyed them before treating them. Consequently how a woman appeared to a man might determine how she would be treated. To acquire some control over this process, women had to contain it, and so they interiorized it. That part of a woman's self which was the surveyor treated the part which was the surveyed, so as to demonstrate to others how her whole self should be treated. And this exemplary treatment of herself by herself constituted her presence. Every one of her actions, whatever its direct purpose, was also simultaneously an indication of how she should be treated. (150)

The above quoted passage from *G* appears almost verbatim in *Ways of Seeing* (on page 46), during a discussion of how “The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman’s self being split into two. A woman must continuously watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually” (46). That passage is in turn reproduced almost verbatim in *G*, on page 149. Containing the process of being surveyed by interiorizing it is a very precise way of describing what Rosemonde is doing throughout the film; demonstrating the ingenuity that she has developed as a result of being socialized, probably from childhood, into such self-surveillance, is a big part of the narrative. It’s not that Rosemonde rejects the process of being surveyed by Pierre and Paul; she basically cooperates with what they want to do. But the film makes it clear that she has interiorized this process of being surveyed by acting very differently when she is with men than when she is alone.

Late in the film, this contrast is so marked that it rises to the quality of the semi-abstract, or perhaps iconic. Late in the film there is a sequence where Rosemonde sits alone on her bed, naked, in a medium-long shot; her voice-over on the soundtrack describes her body, as though through an interior monologue: “I’m twenty-three years old. If I was born six days later, I’d have been named Héliodore. I have small breasts. I like the shape of my legs. I have blonde hair.” Then there is a reverse-shot, so that the camera is facing Rosemonde in a medium close-up. In the background her roommate Suzanne enters, they have a brief exchange about how she can get her a job at a shoe store, she withdraws, and Rosemonde’s interior monologue continues: “People hate my independence and are always trying to break me. They say that I’m soft, wild, hysterical” (*L’Avant-scène cinéma*, 33).¹² She is echoing here what Paul has actually said about her origins (he believes that because she came from such a big family her parents eventually started naming their new kids after the saint day that was closest to their birthdays) as well as what Paul is probably thinking about her (she has small breasts). But she also assumes control over the surveying: *she likes* the shape of her legs, she recognizes her independence as something under threat, her free spirit as something that she is all too aware that others disapprove of. And most importantly, she is alone as she chews all this over, sitting in her

room naked, completely herself; her introspection can only resume when her roommate leaves. These two shots constitute a moving statement of the situation that she finds herself in, and together become a truly cinematic icon whose image- and soundtrack come together to evoke the process by which someone regains some control over their own image. The sequences that follow make very clear the spare eloquence of her interior voice and the beauty of it coming together with her naked body next to a window. We first see her in a medium-long shot as she tries to sell shoes; the film then cuts to a low-angle medium shot of her standing on a ladder as she sorts boxes, and is saying, over and over, “Godasses! Godasses! Godasses!” (a slangy word for shoes) as a co-worker hands her shoeboxes. The film cuts to a two-shot of a middle-aged woman asking her son why he persists in hiring “des jolies petites mômes qui ne savent rien faire” [pretty little chicks who can’t do anything], and he replies that “old grannies don’t sell anything these days” [“les vieilles mères, ça ne fait pas vendre aujourd’hui”]. This is followed by a two-shot of Rosemonde and the owner’s son trying to get her to go out with him. The next sequence has her sitting in Pierre’s apartment, being interviewed yet again by the two guys. Paul asks her how she felt when she left her family at the age of twelve, and she replies with babble: “When I was twelve?... When I was twelve.... I had pretty, cute little.... feet. One day, I put on my cute little feet... One day, I got into my pumpkin. I met the son of the king who had such nice feet... huge.... with big toes. Nicer than your guys!” (*L’Avant-scène cinéma*, 34).¹³ The camera tilts down slightly as she gets down on her knees and starts talking about the guys’ feet. Both scenes play, at first, as childish innocence; Rosemonde seems almost touched, or simple so to speak. But this isn’t simple at all. Rosemonde rebels not through taking action or refusing to participate in these processes of the control of her image – using her to sell shoes, using her as grist for a TV script. Instead, she replies by deforming *language*, by deforming the process of signification, the process through which control over her is being exercised by men. That icon of her on her bed describing her body is an elegant statement of just how in control of language and representation Rosemonde is capable of being, and it is also an elegant statement of how in control of her own body she really is, despite the way that she is, in the next scene, ogled by male customers at the shoe store where she works or, in previous scenes, seen to be employed in the alienatingly repetitive and

exhausting work of sausage stuffing. Frédéric Bas sees the importance of the body as central in Tanner's cinema, especially in *La Salamandre*. Linking his films with those of Phillippe Garrel and Chantal Akerman, he writes that "We can see Tanner's films as a succession of bodily states. *La Salamandre*, for example, where the truth about Rosemonde comes through her body more than through her words. At the beginning, moreover, we only know Rosemonde through the poses of her body: on the assembly line (working), at the pool (resting), at her house dancing, to say nothing of the walking body that opens and closes the film" (180–81).¹⁴ Seeing the narrative as a succession of Rosemonde's bodily poses places this sequence by the window at the very centre of the film, which is indeed where it belongs. It is the point in the film where Rosemonde internalizes all the tensions of the film's narrative, and does so in a way that makes them fully her own because they are part of her body and only part of her body, naked in that scene as she is.

This sequence is, in Berger's formulation an exemplary treatment of herself by herself that allows her to constitute her presence, to keep her from drifting into becoming a non-person who is used by other people, represented by other people, for their own ends. Once cast back into the external world of clothes and shoes and television programs, she understands that she is no longer able to exert the kind of control over the image she presents to the world that she was able to when she was only internalizing it, and so she defends herself on the plane of signification itself. It is this placing together of these three sequences (the first of which is a pure sequence shot and the other two of which are a series of long-ish takes) that expresses this; the realization of Rosemonde's sophistication about the use and abuse of signification is made clear not in any of the sequences alone but by the way they come together. This is, in Tanner's phrase, *montage entre les scènes*, and it is important to note that this supremely expressive montage synthesizes sequences that are, more or less, Bazinian long takes (the sequence with Rosemonde is two shots; the sequence in the shoe store is five; the sequence in Pierre's apartment is a single shot).

This is very similar to a sequence slightly earlier in the film, where Rosemonde is being interviewed by Paul and Pierre. This sequence is made up of three shots but the majority of it is a single, still medium close-up of Rosemonde, directly facing the camera (although ostensibly talking into Pierre's tape recorder) as she recalls holidays in the south of France with

her boyfriend Albert, how her uncle had called the cops when she went with him, how her uncle preferred to vacation at a terrible mountain hotel in the canton of Valais (which is Swiss wine country), etc. The monologue concludes with her saying “Now ... I feel old. It’s more like before (*a pause*). I ask myself what I will become. Before, it was all the same to me. And it didn’t really mean anything.... (*bothered*). I’ve messed up your stuff. Shall we stop?” (*L’Avant-scène cinéma*, 21).¹⁵ Aesthetically this is more Brechtian than the scene on the bed; the meat of the sequence is a very long take that features Rosemonde in a position that is practically a direct address to the viewer; no extra-diegetic voice-over is necessary. Furthermore, we are made extra-aware of the cinematic apparatus by the presence of the tape recorder, which is the camera’s stand-in; when Rosemonde asks Pierre if he wants to stop, she could just as well be talking to Tanner. In terms of what she is saying, we are close to what Berger had in mind in *G* when he talked about nineteenth-century women taking control of the process of men surveying them by interiorizing it. She doesn’t stop her surveying of herself, of the choices that she’s made in her life and the direction that it is presently taking, but she does stop broadcasting it. She thus demonstrates to Pierre and Paul how she wishes to be treated: as someone who has led an interesting, sometimes wild life, but who doesn’t want their help in facing her most serious misgivings about what her choices have meant.

There are comparably iconic moments between Pierre and Paul as well, although they tend to have a more comic tone. The most oft-cited of these is the sequence on a Geneva tram where Paul pretends to be a Turk drumming on a large case and singing, while Pierre pretends to be a reactionarily outraged passenger, trying to rile up his fellow riders – “Italians and Spaniards, you don’t care about them, eh? That’s OK with you! And now we’ve got Turks! Arabs! In Geneva! It’s impossible. I’m telling you, if it keeps on like this, we’ll have Negroes in our trams, with their dances, their boobs in the air, the tam-tams, the drums – incredible!” (*L’Avant-scène-cinéma*, 34).¹⁶ This sequence on the tram is certainly expressive of the degree to which Pierre and Paul are a countercultural couple, rejecting the mainstream values of that most respectable Swiss city of Geneva but doing so in a playful, clowning way. Their work as writers, and writers who challenge mainstream Swiss values, here takes on the form of clowning, a well-worn tradition among left intellectuals. The ideology of their performance here,

while more explicit than any of the work they had done together so far, is consistent with what we've seen them do together: work collaboratively to confront social convention. But despite this sense of challenge through performance, the sequence mostly draws upon semi-classical *découpage* or something like it; most of the compositions are medium shots, and there are a few cuts to medium close-ups of Pierre as he bellows. Formally speaking (although not in terms of its subject matter), it is a fairly straightforward piece of comedy.

A more formally adventurous example of their politically loaded tomfoolery comes when they are walking through the forest during a visit to Rosemonde's family in the country. Pierre loudly laments that they are out here doing nothing and then puts out his arms and yells, "Ah, happiness is close! I feel it coming. You feel it? Ah, happiness is close! Ah happiness is faraway! And prehistory is long!" Paul responds "And we're walking bit by bit towards death," and this seems to really set Pierre off. "Before it bursts, capitalism, in its fundamental perversity, and bureaucracy, in its obtuse dogmatism, will keep crapping on the world!" (*L'Avant-scène cinéma*, 33). Paul continues to chant: "Ah, happiness is close!... Ah, happiness is faraway." They are both dancing by that point.¹⁷ This sequence unfolds in a single shot, with both Pierre and Paul in long shot and the camera moving slightly to follow them. This is comparable to the icon of Rosemonde on the bed, partially because its editing is so minimalist (more so that the sequence with Rosemonde, really). Like the scene with Rosemonde by the window that shortly follows this, though, there is a kind of interiority at work. Pierre and Paul wandering through this empty forest are as removed from the world as Rosemonde was sitting in her spare room; as Rosemonde was only talking to herself, they are only talking to each other. This combination of visual minimalism and interiority combine to render the image iconic rather than indexical, a semi-abstract but still representational embodiment of lyricism and political discontent. This is close to the way that Berger talked about the film to Richard Appignanesi; when Appignanesi asked him if he shared Tanner's interest in absurd or "clownish behaviour," Berger replied:

In *La Salamandre*, for example, that scene in the forest when the two friends suddenly break into an absurd kind of song and dance is a very obvious scene of the type you must be referring

to. But I'm not sure that the function of that scene is simply to show the absurdity of human behavior. It seems to me that it is actually a lyrical moment. It is a lyrical moment about hope, but also about disappointment, and I think hope and disappointment can exist together perfectly without adding up to absurdity. (302)

The coexistence of absurdity and hope is a good way to define the politics of both characters; they are both vaguely leftist and, as the scene on the tram shows, critical of the hypocrisy of their surroundings. But neither one is able to accomplish much in terms of concrete political action. They have hopes for a better world, but their lives as they lead them are defined more by quiet disappointments, like what we see in the film's opening sequences: Pierre negotiating a fee for the bland travel article on Brazil he's written for a Parisian magazine, and Paul working at his day job as a house painter. Charles Sanders Peirce writes of icons that they "convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them" (88). These sequences become icons not only because, as in Tanner's formulation, if you don't cut, you see everything differently, but because they are conveying *ideas* about the characters by imitating them, not by trying to point to their place in physical reality, as an indexical sign would do. The scene by the window conveys the idea of Rosemonde as someone heavily invested in interiority and self-surveillance; this scene in the forest conveys the idea of the guys as part of a left that is both jovial and slightly defeatist. This is an approach to film language, and to narrative as well, that does not jettison realism for the abstraction of the symbol. But sequences like this also reject an indexical or realist strategy for a pattern that is more imitative than representational. Describing his hopes for an Epic Theatre, one that could rise to the task of illuminating a culture for a truly engaged audience in the way classical epic had, Brecht said (in the dialogue with Friedrich Wolf that I mentioned in the introduction) that "It by no means renounces emotion, least of all the sense of justice, the urge to freedom, the righteous anger; it is so far from renouncing these that it does not even assume their presence, but tries to arouse or reinforce them" (227).¹⁸ Rosemonde by the window; the guys pulling the tram stunt; the guys in the forest: these are sequences full of emotion, sequences that arouse and reinforce the viewer's anger at the way women must deal with

the regime of self-surveillance that defines their lives, scenes that arouse the viewer's love of freedom through an anarchic, anti-capitalist song and dance, iconic images that appeal to the viewer's sense of justice.

Small wonder that this "lyrical moment about hope, but also about disappointment" happens in the forest of Rosemonde's home village; that village is, of course, in the Jura. The Jura mountains divide France and Switzerland, and in the 1970s the Bernese Jura was in the middle of considerable political upheaval. Tanner had already made a fiction film that used the Jura as his setting: his debut 1969 feature *Charles Mort ou vif*, where a wealthy industrialist reconnects with the counter-cultural sensibility of his ancestors, one of whom had been part of nineteenth-century anarchist commune in the Jura mountains, by hooking up with a bohemian couple living amidst those very peaks. Tanner had also already made a film about the politics of Jura "separatism," the effort of the majority-francophone parts of Canton Berne (which is majority German-speaking) to secede and form their own Canton Jura: *L'Indépendance au loin* (1965). At the time of *La Salamandre*'s production, 1971, there was still no canton of Jura (the first referendum to separate from Berne came in 1974 and was followed by several municipal referenda and a final federal one in 1978), but in the late 1960s and 70s, the very word "Jura" conjured, in the imagination of most Swiss, the spectre of intense political unrest (at least by Swiss standards). Berger's aforementioned essay about the French painter Courbet, described the French Jura in a 1978 essay as "a region which is both lawless and irreducibly real" (*About Looking*, 137–38). But this Jura "separatism" began as a kind of conservative semi-nationalism, one that drew upon not only a sense of linguistic oppression but also the region's vigorous traditions of Swiss patriotism and overwhelmingly Catholic culture. Pro-Jura rhetoric also often drew on the contrast between the semi-metropolitan culture of Berne, the federal capital, and the mostly rural culture of the Jura. Its imagery was thus very similar to that employed by a lot of early-twentieth-century Irish nationalism. And Paul, in that early sequence when he is describing how he imagines Rosemonde's upbringing from Pierre's Geneva apartment, could just as well be talking about metropolitan Dublin's perception of County Donegal as the storied Jura village of Saint-Ursanne: "So: big family, a real brood, eh! And you say big family, you say countryside. In the city, it's impossible with the real-estate racket. So: countryside, but not just any countryside. It's Catholic,

still a little wild ... contraception unknown.... kids named after saints, everyone exhausted. The dad's kind of thick. Education's not very good" (*L'Avant-scène cinéma*, 12).¹⁹ *La Salamandre* presents the Jura²⁰ as a sort of (presumably priest-ridden) backwater that is consistent with a lot of mainstream Swiss imaginings of the place. At one point a young hoodlum tries to grope Rosemonde, and she pushes him away yelling "con de paysan!," or "peasant asshole!" Furthermore, Rosemonde's petty-bourgeois uncle, who is particularly unhappy about being shot with his own army rifle because after serving with it in the army for thirty years, "it becomes more than just a gun.... It's more the symbol of our liberty" (*L'Avant-scène cinéma*, 17),²¹ is entirely consistent with popular perceptions of Jura culture as being super-patriotic and attached to the military. Tanner and Berger are thus visualizing the life of the *montagnards* as a border culture, part of an interstitial zone where one is equally likely to meet nonconformist radicals dancing in the forest as you are a mother slaving over a hot stove as she tries to prepare supper for her giant family (as we see Rosemonde's mother doing when she brings Paul home to meet her). This vision of the mountains as an unstable, unpredictable space where nonconformist visions of both tradition and modernity collide into each other is, as I argued in the introduction, utterly Swiss, very much a product of the country's history (a history not limited to Jura) of small alpine communities struggling for autonomy against all manner of centralizing forces.

This is, of course, a supremely optimistic view of the world of the mountain community, and it is just that spirit that brings Tanner and Berger into the frame of the Enlightenment tradition. Bas tries to connect Tanner's work to *Candide*, partially by noting that this was one of Brecht's favourite books. In addition to the work's irony leading Brecht (and Tanner) to an interest in distanciation, Bas points out that all of this work is defined by a key tension: "on one hand, the innocence and optimism of the characters; on the other, the horrors of the world" (170).²² The visions of horror in *La Salamandre* come mostly in the form of images of disaffection, and the most vivid such image is definitely the shot of Rosemonde working in a sausage factory. We first see this in a sequence that directly follows Pierre and Paul meeting for the first time and Paul sketching out his semi-fictional view of Rosemonde's background. The sequence is two shots, although most of that is a single shot of Rosemonde, framed from the waist up, working at

the nozzle that spits out sausage innards into casings. The camera doesn't move, there is no sound except for some industrial sounds and some music, and the shot lasts about ninety seconds; it is followed by a very brief shot, set slightly further back, of Rosemonde with two co-workers. (There is a similar sequence, also two shots, a bit later in the film; that one is mostly made up of a very long take of a close-up of the phallic-looking innards dispenser itself.) The contrast between this existence and Pierre and Paul's goofy, slightly intellectualized vision of who she is and how they can write about her is harsh. Part of the sharpness here is at the formal level. The sequence in which Pierre and Paul chatter about big families and kids named after saints is edited following a basically recognizable shot/reverse-shot pattern. It feels a bit slow, but is still relatively easily consumed. It feels "real." The very long take of Rosemonde working that inescapably phallic-looking sausage machine, on the other hand, takes on a discernibly artificial feel, just as Tanner said he felt that long takes can do. The shot that follows it, with Rosemonde at the sausage machine, is slow, still, and clearly signifies the repetitive, meaningless labour that defines a large portion of her day. This is not exactly a moment of Brechtian distancing, but it is just as clearly not a moment of illusionist narrative. Because Tanner doesn't cut, he causes us to see things differently. Rather than a semi-indexical moment of narrative clarity, this is another icon, as powerful in its way as the one of Rosemonde on the bed: an icon of modern, industrial-strength estrangement. Just as Pierre and Paul, as pleasantly gadfly-ish bohemians, are clearly the best possible writers to try to capture this mysterious woman, Rosemonde is the best possible alienated labourer in this best of all possible worlds.

So while it is not a fully realized critique of a violent, bloody world (as *Candide* is), *La Salamandre* is quite a considered critique of representation, of the ways in which people's lives are re-written and presented as re-tellings of reality rather than as fully artificial constructions. The degree to which this is a function of the mass-media increasing omnipresence is much more central to *La Salamandre's* 1995 "remake," *Fourbi*, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. The critique that is being launched here is a more philosophical one; Berger and Tanner are mainly concerned with the impossibility of re-telling anyone's life, at any level: to a mass audience through a television script, from one friend to another as they chat amicably, or to yourself as you

sit completely alone, trying to come to grips with your subjectivity. Part of this scepticism has to do with Tanner's interest in what he calls alienation effects (which he clearly means in a Brechtian sense, as in the audience becoming alienated from or at a distance to the spectacle of the narrative). But Tanner and Berger are more interested in the ways in which the complexity of everyday life is simply incompatible with clear, unambiguous narrative. In some ways this has fairly obvious Wellesian overtones; the name of the main character could certainly be read as a wink to the famous cry "Rosebud!" that comes at the beginning of *Citizen Kane* (1939). But really, the better analogy is with Berger's own towering masterpiece, *G*. To speak in the terms of the epigraph from *G* that opens this chapter, the biography of Rosemonde, the story of whether or not she shot her uncle, emerges here as the self-knowledge of the living minds of Pierre, Paul, and Rosemonde herself. The emergence of this kind of self-knowledge is at the heart of the film. Tarantino writes that "the emphasis in *La Salamandre* is on ways of seeing in themselves, the very existence of different types of knowledge, and therefore, means of obtaining it" ("The Voice Off-Screen," 39). This kind of diversity at times feels deep and fecund, following the Roland Barthes formulation with which I concluded the last chapter. That's true of the sequences when Pierre and Paul are with each other and hatching schemes about how to better get at the story. It's also true of sequences with Paul and Rosemonde, many of which have a very gentle intimacy about them; that's most true of the sequence where the two walk through the wintry Jura landscape, chatting aimlessly about Rosemonde's childhood and eventually breaking into song. Paul sings "There once was a Swedish countess / So pretty and so pale / Oh lumberjack, Oh lumberjack / My suspenders fell to my tail / To my tail, to my tail / Lumberjack, to your knees / And fix them up, don't you mind" (it doesn't rhyme much better in French) (*L'avant-scène cinéma* 32).²³ That entire sequence is only two shots; it is made up of a very long-lasting tracking shot where they are facing the camera which is moving backwards to follow them (and which cuts them off at the waist) and is followed by a briefer reverse-shot, which cuts them off at the knees and also follows them as they walk down the road. The fact that both images are two-shots helps establish some intimacy, or at least some connection between the two, and the slow, leisurely pace both of the characters who walk, combined with the camera that moves with them, all

gives the sequence a sense of gentle flow into the snowy landscape. It is an artificial moment, a sequence whose long takes both give back some reality to the viewer and give an effect of the slightly unreal, the slightly abstract. There are other places in the film where this kind of uncertainty feels more alienating and challenging, and this is most true of the film's pre-credit sequence, which is a jagged montage of close-ups and extreme close-ups, all shot in slow motion and all of which seem to depict Rosemonde shooting her uncle, although we never actually see her with the gun. In the interview that accompanied that *Positif* review that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Laurent Bonnard asked Tanner point-blank, "What, finally, is the point of *La Salamandre*?" Tanner replied that "Contacts with the public have to be made on many levels" (34).²⁴ This is echoed in the ways that Pierre, Paul, and Rosemonde all try to make sense of the history that is constantly evading their grasp: interviews with friends, family, and witnesses; introspection; fictionalization. As all of these ways of knowing collide with one another, we can feel them, in the words from *G* that open this chapter, vibrating in the minds of all three.

It should be no surprise that *La Salamandre* deals with anxiety around the meaning of history and does so through the story of a rebellious young woman, for it was made at a time when Switzerland was undergoing serious changes in its historical understanding of itself, especially when it came to women's roles in society. The film was released in 1971, the same year that a national referendum (held on 7 February 1971) giving women the vote at the federal level was, finally, passed. This followed a previous referendum in 1959, which had been defeated fairly soundly. By 1971 women had already achieved the right to vote in many, although certainly not all, of Switzerland's cantons, and that cantonal process had begun amazingly late; the canton of Basel-Stadt was the first to pass a referendum that allowed for universal suffrage at the cantonal level, in 1966. The last holdout was Appenzell Innerrhoden, which rejected referendum after referendum, only to be ordered by Switzerland's supreme court to give women the vote at the cantonal level in 1990. This is all to say that the figure of an independent, rebellious woman who refuses to let herself be easily known by outsiders has a special significance in Switzerland of 1971. Freddy Buache sees Rosemonde's power largely in terms of how she indicts the illusions of capitalist culture, writing that "Rosemonde is touching because she

confusingly resents (more so than [*Charles mort ou vif*'s] Charles Dé) an oppression that is exactly that which capitalism visits upon any individual who refuses the mirages of an eased conscience" (*Le cinéma suisse*, 149).²⁵ But Rosemonde is also refusing the mirages of tranquility that a society defined by gender inequality offers, especially to women. *Kinder, Kirche und Kuche* is the old way of referring to women's roles in traditional Switzerland: children, church and kitchen. That this formulation is in German is no minor matter; it was mostly German-speaking cantons that were the last holdouts against universal suffrage (Appenzell Innerrhoden was only the most extreme example). Rosemonde is indifferent to or in conflict with all three (especially the first; one of the minor plot points is the discovery that she has had a child that she gave up for adoption), and so as a figure of a new Swiss woman she is startling. That she emerges in 1971 of all years makes her a kind of icon of a resistance to tradition and a headlong rush into an uncertain modernity.

Less than a jazzy, anachronistically New-Wave-style romp through the bohemian environs of Geneva, then, *La Salamandre* is a meditation on knowledge and the ability to communicate that knowledge in a Switzerland whose relationship with modernity, was, in the 1970s, highly fluid. Although it is a lot less experimental in its narrative structure than Berger's *G*, it is very close to that novel's thematic concerns. *G*, in addition to being engaged with the ways that knowledge and modes of communication always exist in multiple and sometimes conflicting forms, is also obsessed with the contours of European history, moving us through a number of that continent's failed revolutions (from workers' uprisings in Milan of the 1890s to early attempts to fly across the alps, and ending in Trieste as the Austro-Hungarian empire breaks apart and that city's Italian and Slavic populations assert themselves in violent opposition). *La Salamandre*, although it has none of the historical detail of Berger's novel, is still also very much engaged with the politics of European insurgency. The film's characters are all restless and aimless, and it's hard not to see that as being a product of the post-68 era, a period in Europe characterized by the failure of revolutionary moments (Paris's days of May, the Prague Spring) and the gradual onset of a sense of powerlessness and disconnection that seemed to be the distinguishing quality of emergent 1970s. That sense solidifies into "normalization" in Berger and Tanner's next film, *Le Milieu du monde*,

a work that presents a European experience marked by a near-complete neutralization of political idealism. *La Salamandre* presents that experience in its nascent form, and through the story of a slightly harried journalist, his shaggy poet friend, and the genuinely mysterious woman whose essence they fail to capture, hints both at some ways that it can be resisted and at the pitfalls of such resistance. It is a deceptively complex film; hiding beneath its eccentric story of shambling young people trying to make their way through the world is a portrait of the culture of western capitalism stuck in a kind of holding pattern. Revolution could be everywhere, but it doesn't ever quite come together. Voltaire's best of all possible worlds is out there somewhere, but this doesn't seem to be it. *Ah, que le bonheur est proche ! Ah que le bonheur est lointain ! Et que la préhistoire est longue !*

Notes

- 1 “Pangloss enseignait la métaphysico-théologo-cosmolonigolie. Il prouvait admirablement qu’il n’y a point d’effet sans cause, et que, dans ce meilleur des mondes possibles, le château de monseigneur le baron était le plus beau des châteaux et madame la meilleure de baronnes possibles” (138).
- 2 “Ce qui m’a frappé d’abord dans ce film, c’est un (déjà) parfum d’archaïsme. Alain Tanner refait en mieux certain « Nouvelle Vague ».”
- 3 “Je cite de mémoire Octavio Paz, qui a très bien défini ce qu’est la modernité en art. Pour lui, la modernité, c’est lorsque, à l’intérieur de l’œuvre, dans son fonctionnement et son tissu même, il apparaît une critique de son propre moyen d’expression, quel qu’il soit, littérature, peinture ou cinéma, et cette position critique vient en transformer à la fois la texture et a finalité. À partir de Paz, il est évident qu’on ne peut que déboucher sur Brecht.”
- 4 The English text is taken from the Nobel website: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-lecture-e.html (6 May 2010). The Spanish text is as follows: “La modernidad es la punto del movimiento histórico, la encarnación de la evolución o de la revolución, las dos caras del progreso” (55–56) “Volví a mi origen y descubrí que la modernidad no está afuera sino adentro de nosotros. Es hoy y es la antigüedad mas antigua, es mañana y es el comienzo del mundo, tiene mil años y acaba de nacer” (63).
- 5 “J’ai longtemps sorti de mon esprit certains de mes films, parce que je les trouvais trop discursifs, pieds et poings liés au présent. Je pense à *La Salamandre* ou à *Jonas qui aura vingt-cinq ans en l’an 2000*. Je m’aperçois aujourd’hui que s’ils refont surface, c’est avant tout parce qu’ils étaient complètement ancrés dans la modernité.”
- 6 “Ici, nous étions à l’extrémité ouest du pays, à deux pas de la frontière, et la Suisse semblait déjà lointain. Nous lui tournions le dos.”
- 7 “Paul écrivait dans son carnet : « La Salamandre est un joli petit animal de la famille des lézards. Elle est noire avec des taches jaune-oranges. La Salamandre est vénimeuse. Elle ne craint pas le feu et peut traverser les flammes sans se brûler. »”
- 8 “En dépit de certaines apparences, auxquelles il ne faut jamais se fier, Paul n’était pas peintre en bâtiment ou chanteur, mais écrivain.”
- 9 “... la littérature réaliste est, certes, narrative, mais c’est parce que le réalisme est en elle seulement parcellaire, erratique, confiné aux « détails » et que le récit le plus réaliste qu’on puisse imaginer se développe selon des voies irréalistes.”
- 10 “PAUL. C’est pas mal, cette histoire! Je vais rester. Qu’est-ce que tu penses ?
PIERRE. C’est pas mal, mais il y a tout de même un petit problème.
PAUL. Lequel ?
PIERRE. Qu’est-ce que tu fais de la réalité dans tout ça ?

PAUL. Eh bien, ça fait cinq minutes que je t'en parle de la réalité !... Mis à part peut-être quelques détails, j'ai l'impression d'avoir déjà bien gagné ma journée.

PIERRE. Bon. Tu as bien gagné ta journée, mais il est aussi très possible que tu aies rêvé. Je ne vois pas très bien pourquoi on aurait du prime abord recours à ton imagination alors que l'histoire s'est réellement passée. La fille existe, l'oncle aussi. Ils sont ici, quelque part. C'est la réalité qui m'intéresse,... (*insistant*) ... les choses ! Il faut partir de là et connaître ... toucher ce qui peut se toucher. (*Paul veut intervenir.*) Non, tu gambergeras après. Il faut d'abord faire une enquête.

PAUL (*bourru*). J'suis pas un flic.

PIERRE. Une enquête journalistique, tête de lard !

PAUL (*même ton*). J'suis pas journaliste."

- 11 "Mais j'ai pas vraiment voulu, je sais pas... ça s'est passé comme ça, sur un coup de colère. Je pouvais plus le supporter, ce vieux connard,... il arrêtait pas de m'emmerder. Il voulait toujours que je travaille,... même quand il y avait rien du tout à faire. Comme à l'armée (*un silence*). Il arrêtait pas de râler, de me faire la morale. Depuis, j'ai toujours peur de m'emballer, de faire une connerie. Je sais pas quoi faire..."
- 12 "J'ai 25 ans. Si j'étais née six jours plus tard, je m'appellerais Héliodore. J'ai des petits seins. J'aime bien la forme de mes jambes. J'ai les cheveux blondes... Les gens détestent mon indépendance et essaient toujours de me briser. Ils disent de moi que je suis

paresseuse, sauvage, hystérique." The published scenario says twenty-five years old; the dialogue in the film says twenty-three.

- 13 "Quand j'avais douze ans?... Quand j'avais douze ans... j'avais de jolis petits pieds,... mignons. Un jour, j'ai mis mes jolis petits pieds,... mignons. Un jour, j'ai mis mes citrouille [*sic*]. J'ai rencontré le fils du roi qui avait de si beaux pieds,... immenses,... avec des grands orteils. Plus beaux que les vôtres!"
- 14 "On peut d'ailleurs raconter bien des films de Tanner comme une succession d'états du corps. *La Salamandre*, par exemple, où la vérité de Rosemonde passe par son corps davantage que par ses mots. Au début, on ne connaît d'ailleurs Rosemonde que par des postures de son corps : à la chaîne (au travail), à la piscine (au repos), chez elle en train de danser, sans oublier son corps marchant qui ouvre et conclut le film."
- 15 "Maintenant ... (*elle hésite*). Je me trouve vieille. C'est plus comme avant (*un temps*). Je me demande ce que je vais devenir. Avant, ça m'était égal. Puis, ça ne fait rien ... (*énermée*). J'en ai marre de votre truc. On arrête?"
- 16 "Les Italiens et les Espagnols, ça vous intéresse pas,... hein? Ça vous suffit, d'ailleurs. Et voilà les Turcs maintenant!... Les Arabes!... A Genève!... Pas possible ça. Moi, je vous le dis, hein Monsieur, Mademoiselle aussi, si ça continue comme ça, on aura des nègres dans nos tramways, avec leur danses (*il mime*) avec les lolos en l'air, des tams-tams, des batteries,... incroyable!" This sequence takes on an extra edge in retrospect; I am writing this in December 2009, less than a

- week after 59% of Switzerland voted to ban the construction of minarets (although I am writing it from the staunchly Catholic city of Fribourg, where the initiative got only 39% of the vote).
- 17 “PIERRE. Ah, que le bonheur est proche ! (*il respire.*) Je le sens venir. Tu le sens?... (*gueulant presque.*) Ah, que le bonheur est proche ! Ah que le bonheur est lointain ! Et que la préhistoire est longue !... (*il rit.*)
- PAUL. (riant et déclamant). Et nous marchons à petits pas vers la mort.
- PIERRE. Avant de crever, le capitalisme, dans sa perversité fondamentale, et la bureaucratie, dans son dogmatisme obtu [*sic*], feront chier encore pas mal de monde !
- PAUL (déclamant). Ah que le bonheur est proche !... Ah, que le bonheur est lointain !”
- 18 “Es verzichtet in keiner Weise auf Emotionen. Schon gar nicht auf das Gerechtigkeitsgefühl, den Freiheitsdrang und den gerechten Zorn: es verzichtet so wenig darauf, daß es sich sogar nicht auf ihr Vorhandensein verläßt, sondern sie zu verstärken oder zu schaffen sucht” (“Formprobleme des Theaters,” 254).
- 19 “Donc : famille nombreuse,... la vraie marmaille, quoi ! Et qui dit famille nombreuse dit campagne. En ville, c’est impossible avec le racket immobilier. Donc : campagne, mais pas n’importe laquelle, campagne catholique, encore un peu broussailleuse,... contraception inconnue,... saints du calendrier, tout le fourbi. Le père a un peu de plomb dans l’aile. L’éducation souffre de quelques imperfections.”
- 20 The word “Jura” is not spoken in any of the dialogues of *La Salamandre*, although the published screenplay specifies that when Rosemonde, Pierre, and Paul go to visit Rosemonde’s family, they are driving to “Quelque part dans le Jura” (26). More importantly, though, Rosemonde recalls how for a brief period during her childhood, “on habitait de l’autre côté de la frontière, en France” (*L’Avant-scène cinéma*, 32).
- 21 “Ça devient plus qu’un simple mousqueton; c’est un peu le symbole de nos libertés, à nous autres.”
- 22 “... d’un côté, l’innocence et l’optimisme du personnage; de l’autre, les horreurs du monde.”
- 23 “Il y avait une fois une comtesse suédoise / Elle était très belle et très pâle / Monsieur le forestier, Monsieur le forestier / Ma jarretelle a sauté / Elle a sauté, elle a sauté / Forestier, vite à genoux / Et rajustez-la sans peur.”
- 24 “— Et quel est, en définitive, le propos de *La Salamandre*? — Les contacts avec le public doivent se faire à plusieurs niveaux.”
- 25 “Rosemonde touche juste parce qu’elle ressent confusément (plus confusément encore que Charles Dé) une oppression qui est exactement celle que le capitalisme opulent fait peser sur chaque individu refusant ... les mirages de la conscience tranquille et la veulerie.”