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*Parlando di cinema e mondo antico
con Hervé Dumont e Martin M. Winkler*

Abstract

Hervé Dumont (<http://www.hervedumont.ch/content/index.html>) and Martin M. Winkler (<http://mcl.gmu.edu/people/details/mwinkler>), two of the greatest specialists in cinema, have answered very kindly some questions about the topic.

Hervé Dumont (<http://www.hervedumont.ch/content/index.html>) e Martin M. Winkler (<http://mcl.gmu.edu/people/details/mwinkler>), due fra i più grandi studiosi ed esperti, fra l'altro, di cinema, hanno accettato con grande disponibilità di rispondere ad alcune domande relative ai temi della sezione *Cinema e mondo antico* di *Dionysus ex Machina*.

1) La prima domanda riguarda un problema terminologico: a distanza ormai di quasi cinquant'anni dalla stagione del cinema italiano tratto da soggetti mitologici, si discute ancora del nome da dare al 'genere': *peplum, sword and sandals*, film in costume, à l'*antique* (come suggerisce Hervé Dumont nel suo recente *L'Antiquité au cinéma*), ecc. Quali sono, a vostro avviso, i motivi di questa oscillazione? È solo un problema di nomi o c'è anche una valutazione diversa sulla natura e gli scopi di questo filone cinematografico? Esistono, secondo voi, soluzioni più significative?

H.D. Estimant que la représentation de l'Antiquité à l'écran est un phénomène qui dépasse de très loin le "fandom" ou la simple cinéphilie, en raison de tout ce qu'elle peut apporter en renseignements et en découvertes artistiques, sociologiques, politiques, etc., un de mes principaux soucis a toujours été de m'adresser non seulement aux amateurs inconditionnels du genre (pour lesquels, du reste, la dénomination importe peu), mais surtout à tous les autres spectateurs potentiels. Il y a là, si vous voulez, de ma part un souci pédagogique lié à une forte envie de défendre, voire de réhabiliter une catégorie de films qui a été trop longtemps méprisée par une certaine intelligentsia, alors que beaucoup de ces productions méritent un regard plus approfondi, une étude nuancée au même titre que celle qu'on porte aux musicals ou au film noir.

Par conséquent, j'évite le plus souvent possible le terme de "péplum" (sauf en discussion orale), qui est et reste connoté négativement, puisqu'il est apparu en France au début des années 1960 pour désigner l'invasion d'une production de films en costumes fabriquée à la va-vite et destinée à la consommation immédiate. Or même dans ce contexte précis, il convient de différencier un quelconque Maciste d'un

Cottafavi. Certains appliquent ce terme même à des films qui se déroulent au Moyen Age, ce qui en dit long sur le sérieux de cette dénomination et de ses utilisateurs. J'ai personnellement horreur des critiques ou prétendus historiens qui, tout en aimant le genre incriminé se contentent d'ironiser avec affection à son sujet, une attitude superficielle et surtout contre-productive. De même que je ne pourrais pas classer, par exemple, High Noon de Fred Zinnemann, The Last Hunt de Richard Brooks, Little Big Man d'Arthur Penn ou Dances with Wolves de Kevin Costner dans une catégorie intitulée "guns & horses", il me semble absurde, voire carrément insultant de réunir Cabiria de Pastrone, Cleopatra de Mankiewicz, King of Kings de Ray ou le Medea de Pasolini sous le terme de "sword & sandals".

Un terme plus neutre, plus respectueux et moins limitatif comme par exemple celui de "film historique à l'antique" me semble plus approprié, plus apte à englober un très vaste type de productions, de provenance internationale et qui englobent des films de nature très différentes. La persistance du terme "péplum" ou les divers motifs de l'oscillation terminologique que vous signalez tiennent à mon avis surtout à la paresse ou au mépris inconscient des utilisateurs pour un genre jugé indigne de leur préoccupations.

M.M.W. When is a Western not a *Western* but a *horse opera*, a *shoot-'em-up*, or a *cowboy movie*? In general, when is a film a *movie* or a *flick*? Such considerations of nomenclature may strike some as idle, but they probably are not. The terminology employed can tell us something about the intellectual perspective of its user, especially if that user is an academic. Lovers of Westerns will hardly be happy if, for instance, John Ford's *The Searchers* is called a horse opera or Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* a cowboy movie (even if not a single cowboy appears in the latter). It seems safe to conclude that, the more derogatory the generic term, the more dismissive the attitude underlying it. Unintentionally, the very terminology that appears early in an argument concerning cinema hints at the results of the analysis that follows it. This phenomenon can often be observed when classical scholars venture into cinematic territory. *Sword-and-sandals movie* is virtually always meant condescendingly, and so is *costume drama* or its German equivalent *Kostümfilm* or *Antikfilm*. Close to these is the German *Monumentalfilm*, which comes perilously close to *Historienschinken*, yet another strongly derogatory term. (It denotes a bloated and outmoded historical epic.)

In *The Epic Film: Myth and History*, Derek Elley subsumes films with Greek and Roman settings under the term *epic*. This is a sensible procedure, if not one without its own problem. In literature, on the screen, and elsewhere, *epic* implies a large and momentous subject, but not all historical or mythical films are epics. The films of the 1950s and early 1960s, the heyday of epic filmmaking, that are most famous today deal with major historical topics at significant length (three hours or more), in color and

usually widescreen, often with stereophonic sound, with the proverbial cast of thousands, and at immense cost. In comparison with the best-known Hollywood productions – I use the term loosely to accommodate, e.g., the films produced by Samuel Bronston in Spain – many of the Italian films that were made at the same time could not qualify as epics. Then what about *peplum*? This word, too, often carries derogatory connotations. The title of a recent book by Claude Aziza is instructive: *Le péplum, un mauvais genre* (2009), even if the author does not himself consider the peplum all that bad a genre. Then there is the cultural aspect of the word *peplum*, the Latin equivalent of Greek *peplos*. Classical scholars but few others will be aware that a peplum is originally a woman's garment, most famously that of the goddess Athena, and only secondarily a man's loose and usually elaborate cloak. A peplum is never the kind of miniskirt worn by Hercules, assorted gladiators, and similar heroes in the kind of film most often referred to as *peplum*.

Some scholars are aware of the Scylla of inaccuracy and the Charybdis of condescension. Jon Solomon has proposed the term *Ancients* – perhaps in analogy to *Westerns* – for “films set in antiquity”, alongside *Thematics* for “films dependent on ancient themes” and *Allusives* for “films containing specific classical allusions” (*Film Philology: Towards Effective Theories and Methodologies*, «International Journal of the Classical Tradition» XVII [2010] 435-49; quotations from page 443). It remains to be seen if these will become standard vocabulary. (I am myself sceptical.) Perhaps Hervé Dumont's expression *film à l'antique* or Natacha Aubert's *cinéma d'après l'antique*, a phrase that furnishes the main title for her 2009 book on Italian silent films, are the best suited expressions, although they may strike some as a little clumsy. But then, for the films in question there may not exist a name that is simultaneously concise, accurate, and neutral. We may be left with a case of *quot pelliculae, tot nomina*.

2) La seconda domanda ne contiene anche altre: il cinema che riguarda il mondo antico è stato da tempo segnalato come una risorsa importante, non solo per la produzione cinematografica, ma anche per le istituzioni educative (scuola e università), e per gli studi classici in particolare. Martin M. Winkler ha richiamato spesso il caso di *Media of Salvation*, un articolo del 1920 del latinista George Depue Hadzists, sulla rivista «The Classical Weekly». Individuate delle differenze in questo campo fra i vari paesi, in particolare fra Europa e Stati Uniti? In quali forme sviluppereste questa funzione? Fra filologia classica e filologia filmica i rapporti possono crescere ulteriormente e influenzarsi a vicenda?

H.D. Le recours du film à l'antique dans l'enseignement reste, à ce jour et du moins en Europe, sujet à caution. De nombreuses tentatives ont été faites dans ce sens, avec des résultats mitigés selon la nature de l'auditoire et la qualité des professeurs. Il ne fait

pas de doute que la jeunesse et la majorité du public contemporain ne connaît de l'Antiquité que ce que les médias audiovisuels lui ont transmis, et il y a de toute évidence un terrain à labourer.

Au collège, l'utilisation de films dans le cadre d'études classiques a surtout une fonction motivante: elle permet de visualiser et d'actualiser (en mode très approximatif) des événements, balayer des réticences juvéniles, réveiller la curiosité pour un univers que les textes classiques ne suffisent pas toujours à "colorer". Eventuellement aussi à rectifier certaines fausses idées véhiculées par d'autres manifestations de la culture populaire (bande dessinée, etc.). Cet apport n'est jamais à sous-estimer, mais il est limité et nécessite un encadrement.

A l'université, l'approche est foncièrement autre et présuppose une préparation extrêmement sérieuse de l'enseignant, tant historique que cinématographique. C'est là que réside toute la difficulté, car il s'agit idéalement de réunir trois démarches différentes relatives 1) à la matière antique traitée, 2) à la nature de la production filmique qui l'aborde et 3) à l'époque (et le pays) qui permet cette production. Un séminaire d'archéologie ou d'histoire antique se heurtera forcément aux irrégularités ou libertés prises avec l'Histoire telle qu'elle est enseignée. Cette démarche "de facilité" débouchera, comme trop souvent, sur des résultats prévisibles de rejet, d'incompréhension ou de sarcasmes, si le professeur n'a pas auparavant focalisé ses étudiants sur la nature même du spectacle cinématographique, ses sources et ses influences, sur la dramaturgie spécifique du film historique, ses nécessités pragmatiques. Enfin et surtout, sur la portée "actuelle" de la représentation à l'antique et la problématique générale liée à la reconstitution d'un passé, que ce soit dans les beaux-arts, sur scène ou à l'écran. En revanche, il ne fait pas de doute que l'étude bien préparée de ce type de films peut enrichir et élargir considérablement le débat philologique, comme on le constate aujourd'hui dans diverses universités en Italie, en Allemagne et dans les pays anglo-saxons. A en juger des récentes publications, les travaux en France dans ce domaine sont encore embryonnaires.

M.M.W. This is a particularly important topic, doubtless close to the heart of most classics teachers. Current trends in scholarship and teaching have increasingly focused on aspects of *reception*, the different ways in which antiquity has inspired writers, visual artists, architects, politicians, and a host of others from the Middle Ages, if not earlier, until today. In this vast tradition of influence, work on the reception of Greece and Rome in the cinema has blossomed so much that it now outpaces most other areas of reception studies. Two statements published in «The Classical Review», one of our profession's foremost book review journals, indicate the changes that occurred in just over half a decade. In 1999, a reviewer began with the following statement: *The combination of classics and film studies is not a common field of interdisciplinary*

research (Ch. Catrein, «The Classical Review» n.s. IL [1999] 244-46). As early as 2005, however, another reviewer could make the following claim: «successfully – and fruitfully – the study of classics and cinema has asserted itself as a leader in the field of reception studies» (J. Paul, «The Classical Review» n.s. LV [2005] 688-90, at 688). *Habent sua fata et studia classica.*

Just as Muriel Spark's Miss Brodie praised Mussolini for raising Roman history and culture to new prominence – a memorable moment in Ronald Neame's 1969 film adaptation of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, with Maggie Smith – so classics teachers have always looked to the cinema as a powerful new ally, a mass medium that spreads the word about Greece and Rome throughout contemporary society. The short article by Hadzsits referred to above is a telling instance, if not the first. In 1918, American classicist David Martin Key, the future President of Millsaps College in Mississippi, had suggested to combine stage and screen in school performances of Greek plays. His perspective is worth quoting:

May not the ever-present ‘movies’ help to carry some of the advantages of the Greek play to many Schools that are not now equal to the task of staging one? [...] As a bit of publicity, it would be well worth the while of a Classical Association to engage a competent director to undertake the filming of a play [...]. The success in 1915 of the Iphigenia in Tauris [...] suggests that a classical film of such a character might have even a popular run. (*Filming a Greek Play*, «The Classical Weekly» XI/19 [March 11, 1918] 152).

Still earlier, B. L. Ullman, at the time editor of the same journal, had made a similar point in an Editor's Letter («The Classical Weekly» VIII/26 [May 8, 1915] 201-202). He began with this statement: «A few years ago it would have seemed utterly absurd to assert that the ‘Movies’ could be a valuable aid to the Classics». (Note the term and its quotation marks!) What Ullman, Key, Hadzsits, and perhaps several others envisioned back then has become reality now. In the analogue and digital video age, classics and theater departments of schools and colleges often stage and then film ancient plays. Besides, the continuing popularity of spectacular historical and mythical epics on cinema screens and the ubiquity of Greece and Rome on educational (or pseudo-educational) television channels practically guarantee the continuing presence of Greece and Rome in the popular awareness. In all of this, there seems to be little difference between Europe and the U.S. or indeed throughout the world. The time of the image as primary means of storytelling arrived in 1895 with the brothers Lumière and their cinematograph. It is here to stay.

This, of course, does not guarantee that classics is being helped or saved by the cinema, as Ullman and Hadzsits might have believed or hoped. In retrospect, the latter's religious language (“salvation”) is oddly touching. But this view has not subsided entirely. American classics professor and philhellene Marianne McDonald recently

entitled her contribution to an essay collection on reception *A New Hope: Film as a Teaching Tool for the Classics* (in L. Hardwick – Ch. Stray [eds.], *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Oxford 2008 [rpt. 2010] 327-41). “New hope” is more of a secular than a religious term – it comes from the *Star Wars* films, which McDonald discusses – but her perspective stays close to that of Hadzsits. *Plus ça change...*

If cinema can support classics (even involuntarily), can filmic analysis help classical scholars and teachers interpret ancient literature and communicate its greatness to students, even to those with little or no previous background knowledge of antiquity? I, for one, firmly believe that it can. The cinematic qualities of many classical texts – *avant la lettre et avant l'idée* – are clear to all who know and love both Greco-Roman literature and film. I have attempted to illustrate some of these qualities in a number of my publications, so I need not pursue the topic any further here.

3) Ecco un terzo gruppo di domande: a partire dalle pellicole italiane (mute) dei primi del ‘900 fino alla ripresa del filone, fra fine ‘900 e primi anni del 2000, il rapporto fra cinema e *antiquité/ancient world* ha sfruttato, per così dire, le varie facce della cultura antica, mitologica, storiografica, letteraria, religiosa ecc. Pensate che gli esperimenti fatti finora abbiano esaurito le potenzialità di questo rapporto? Individuate altre forme possibili di ‘rappresentazione’ del mondo antico attraverso il cinema? Tornando a possibili differenze fra Europa e Stati Uniti, pensate che esistano modelli diversi di rapporto col mondo antico o le differenze dipendono dalla sensibilità dei singoli registi?

H.D. Il me semble à première vue qu'on a presque tout dit sur la différence de perspective européenne et américaine en la matière (du moins pour les films les plus représentatifs), quoiqu'une étude sérieuse, qui ne se complaît pas dans les généralités faciles, sur structures, thématiques et caractéristiques du cinéma à l'antique italien sonore fait toujours défaut. Par ailleurs, en effet, les clés interprétatives des œuvres marquantes sont plutôt à chercher dans la sensibilité individuelle des créateurs.

Un chapitre toutefois reste encore sérieusement sous-représenté dans la masse des études à ce sujet, sans doute en raison de l'accès pas toujours facile des copies de films ou des DVD, et aussi en raison de facteurs linguistiques: le traitement de l'Antiquité occidentale à travers le cinéma non-occidental: les "vies" ou exploits d'Alexandre le Grand, ou de ses généraux dans le cinéma indien, les diverses bio de Cléopâtre dans le cinéma égyptien, les très nombreux films (et téléfilms) bibliques sur des chapitres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament dans le cinéma turc et iranien – Moïse, Abraham, Joseph, David, le Christ, Marie, etc., etc. Il y a là encore des découvertes stupéfiantes à faire, pas nécessairement d'un point de vue qualitatif, mais du point de vue de l'éclairage religieux ou politique donné.

M.M.W. Classical antiquity, especially figures from myth and Roman history, appeared on the cinema screen as early as the 1890s. Ancient historical epics reached a zenith in the Italian silent cinema and, once again, in Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout film history, we encounter a whole range of filmmakers, from the Parnassus of art cinema down to the Subura of exploitation. They include some of the greatest artists (Jean Cocteau, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Roberto Rossellini, Miklós Jancsó, Jean Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet), highly committed studio directors (Giovanni Pastrone, Enrico Guazzoni, Vittorio Cottafavi, William Wyler, Anthony Mann), dedicated although sometimes marginal industry figures (Jules Dassin, Michael Cacoyannis), clever exploiters of trends (William Castle, Roger Corman, most of the Italians directing Hercules films and similar fare), purveyors of more or less explicit sex and violence (better left unidentified), pornographers (most famously or infamously, Bob Guccione), and a host of mavericks, independents, and others. The names mentioned above exemplify certain aesthetic levels; many other names could, of course, be added. Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) almost single-handedly jump-started, as it were, epic cinema anew. Since then, Greek and Roman themes from Greek myth to late-Roman history have become a prominent part of film history again. Thus ended a long period of slumber that had stretched from Richard Lester's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966) to *Gladiator* and that had been interrupted only occasionally by films or mini-series made for television. These latter, however, included as ambitious a production as Franco Rossi's magnificent six-hour *Odissea* (1968) and as popular an adaptation as Herbert Wise's *I, Claudius* (1976).

Anyone who looks through Jon Solomon's *The Ancient World in the Cinema* (2001²) or now Hervé Dumont's *L'Antiquité au Cinéma* (2009) will be struck by the variety with which the cinema has dealt with the ancient cultures. Is then its potential for telling and retelling Greek, Roman, biblical, and related stories exhausted? This does not seem likely. There is always a new hero and villain, a new romance and *femme fatale*, a new battle for empire and struggle for justice to be filmed, to say nothing of the possibilities that come with technical advances such as computer-generated images (CGI). At a time that various Fantasy subjects like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* or, yet again, vampires, monsters, and other supernatural phenomena become blockbuster films because they can attract the curious by showing them the unseen or previously invisible, films about antiquity follow suit. From Louis Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* (2010) or Chris Columbus's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010), the latter a mixture of contemporary and ancient plot strands, we can perhaps gauge what the future of antiquity on our screens may look like (*Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Sea of Monsters* has been announced for 2012). CGI seems to rule, not always for the better. But it is, potentially at least, a valuable tool to

put the wonderment inherent in classical myth or Roman architecture directly before our eyes.

CGI may also bring European and American filmmaking more closely together, at least stylistically. Several of the superproductions of the 1950s and 1960s had been joint American-European ventures, e.g. Wyler's *Ben-Hur*, which was filmed in Italy, and the various historical epics produced by Bronston in Spain, which combined international casts and crews. Apart from such films, however, viewers in general could probably immediately tell the difference between an American and an Italian studio production simply from the lobby cards in their theaters and know what to expect from European and American films. This seems hardly possible today. Alejandro Amenábar's *Agora* (2009), for instance, is a Spanish production partly filmed on Malta (like *Gladiator* or Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* of 2004), but because of its extensive use of CGI it looks just as slick as contemporary Hollywood cinema. *Agora*, however, is not as superficial as, for instance, Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans*. The intelligence of director and co-writer Amenábar, his evident commitment to the story of Hypatia, and the film's presentation of religious conflicts reveal a European or international sensibility of a kind we might not expect to come out of Hollywood.

And herein may lie the greatest artistic prospect for the future of Greece and Rome on screen: a committed creative artist's individual shaping of historical, literary, or mythical stories for the screen. In the first chapter of *Cinema and Classical Texts: Apollo's New Light* (2009), I have argued for the perspective that director Frank Capra expressed in the phrase «one man, one film». The greatest directors in cinema history have proven him right. So let us hope that this side of filmmaking will not be eclipsed by the loud and empty wizardry of CGI.

4) Ora una domanda legata agli ambiti caratterizzanti della nostra rivista *Dionysus ex Machina*: pensate che la trascrizione filmica di soggetti teatrali antichi (greci e latini) costituisca un settore da affrontare con analisi specifiche? In fondo, si tratta di testi che hanno già, per così dire, una sceneggiatura strutturata.

H.D. Oui, de telles transcriptions peuvent amplement se justifier, pour autant qu'il ne s'agisse pas de simples captations (c'est-à-dire d'enregistrements témoins d'une représentation scénique). En revanche, des adaptations d'oeuvres classiques dans lesquelles intervient un travail créatif sur le plan visuel et contextuel, comme par exemple Oedipus the King (1956) de Tyrone Guthrie et Abraham Polonsky, ou la version de 1957 de Philip Saville, avec Orson Welles, ou encore I Persiani de Vittorio Cottafavi, d'après Eschyle (tv 1975) sont des œuvres à part entière dont la mise en scène apporte une dimension supplémentaire qui peut accentuer ou infléchir des

passages entiers du texte original. Finalement, toutes les transcriptions, sans distinctions, ont leur place dans un corpus qui souhaiterait témoigner de la présence de l'Antiquité sous ses formes les plus diverses dans le paysage médiatique d'aujourd'hui.

M.M.W. Just as the long tradition of staging classical drama in the theater has provided, and doubtless will continue to provide, an important strand in any culture's artistic engagement with Greece and Rome, so film versions of ancient plays, especially of Greek tragedies, form a major part in the spectrum of visual recreations of ancient stories. The best parallel case from outside Greco-Roman literature is the stage and screen history of Shakespeare. The theater, as its original Greek name (*theatron*) already reveals, is a *viewing space*. Text and image, the verbal and the visual, are equally essential to drama. Shakespeare's or Sophocles' personal experiences attest to this. If cinema is heir to theater, then film versions of classical, Shakespearian, and all other kinds of stage plays demand and deserve serious considerations. It is a commonplace to say that, were he alive today, Shakespeare would write for cinema or television. The same might be said about the Athenian playwrights. Even the traditional five-act structure of drama, which derives from the episodic structure of Greek tragedy, has long provided screenwriters with a useful model for their own plot constructions in all film genres.

Screen adaptations of ancient plays come in different ways or “modes”, as Kenneth MacKinnon calls them in his short book *Greek Tragedy into Film* (1986), following Jack J. Jorgens's book *Shakespeare on Film* (1977). Films as varied as the adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* by Pasolini and Lars van Trier, the latter derived from an unproduced screenplay by Carl Theodor Dreyer; as idiosyncratic but gripping as Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex* (*Edipo re*) or, again, his *Medea*; as rigorously anti-spectacular as the *Antigone* by Straub and Huillet, which is Sophocles via Hölderlin and Brecht; and as endlessly different as all the Oedipus films ever made since the early days of the silent era (I outline this history and its variations in Chapter 3 of *Cinema and Classical Texts*)—all these films and many others justify screen adaptations of ancient drama. (Incidentally, there is also more of Aristophanes in the cinema than one might casually assume.) In short, we would be sadly impoverished if filmmakers were to stop turning to the ancient playwrights for inspiration. Their works come with a given structure, but so do novels, which are turned into films even more often. The films of classical tragedy reveal the “infinite variety,” to borrow a famous phrase from Shakespeare, of screen adaptations of drama.

5) Il mondo antico è stato ‘riprodotto’ non solo a teatro, dagli stessi antichi, né è riprodotto solo dal cinema, ma anche da altri media, quali la televisione, e potremmo anche aggiungere le immagini interattive dei videogiochi, alcuni dei quali hanno come ‘ambiente’ il mondo antico,

storico o mitologico (cf. D. Lowe, *Playing with Antiquity: Videogame Receptions of the Classical World*, in D. Lowe – K. Shahabudin [eds.], *Classics for All. Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture*, Newcastle u. Tyne 2009, 64-90; P. Christesen – D. Machado, *Video Games and Classical Antiquity*, «Classical World» CIV [2010] 107-10). Pensate che ci sia ancora una gerarchia di valore fra queste ‘fonti’ in relazione alle culture antiche o ritenete che la tecnologia audiovisuale permetta di portare a un nuovo livello il dialogo col mondo antico? E in che misura ritenete che le esigenze legate al genere cinematografico e a quelle di “fare spettacolo” possano giustificare inesattezze storiche e filologiche?

H.D. Je ne suis pas persuadé que les nouvelles technologies audiovisuelles apportent un approfondissement de perspective quelconque, hormis des indications d'ordre sociologique et une sorte de baromètre sur la qualité des rapports que nos contemporains ont avec leur passé. Elles me semblent trop souvent traduire en priorité le degré d'inculture classique croissant du public jeune, dans la mesure où les faits historiques sont réinventés, sortis de leur contexte réel ou mythologique, réduits à des aventures “antiquisantes” souvent d'une consternante platitude, mélangeant sans distinction fantastique récent, space opera, sword & sorcery, etc. Tout cela pour aboutir souvent à un renversement des faits et mythes représentés (l'exemple de 300 de Zack Snyder est parlant). A travers les siècles, les faits et gestes de l'Antiquité ont toujours été adaptés aux goûts et à la politique du moment, mais jamais transformés, détournés à ce point là, processus qui me semble irréversiblement lié à une sorte de perte collective de la mémoire des temps anciens.

Quant à votre dernière question, elle mériterait de longs développements que j'essaierai de résumer ainsi:

Etant d'abord cinéphile et historien du cinéma, avant même d'être historien intéressé par l'Antiquité, j'ai toujours eu de la difficulté à comprendre pourquoi les libertés poétiques phénoménales prises avec l'Histoire chez un Shakespeare, Corneille ou Giuseppe Verdi étaient unanimement acceptées, parfois même acclamées (pour la simple raison qu'il s'agit de versification ou de musique, sans parler des beaux-arts!) – et tout aussi unanimement condamnées au cinéma. Cela tient de toute évidence au fait que le langage cinématographique n'est toujours pas reconnu “per se”, et que le cinéma, lié au fameux “effet du réel” illusoire qui lui est propre, continue à être confondu avec du reportage photographique. On résume obstinément sa fonction à une transcription fidèle d'une donnée historique, ce qui est ignorer la nature même de la création cinématographique. Si l'on condamne les irrégularités historiques d'un scénario, que dire alors des distorsions intéressées et tout sauf innocentes de leurs sources mêmes, d'un Thucydide, d'un Tacite, d'un César, d'un Pline? Cela dit, le “besoin de faire du spectacle” n'est de loin pas la seule raison des inexactitudes qui foisonnent dans le cinéma qui nous intéresse ici, et je pense que, justement, l'étude du “pourquoi” des

alterations, omissions ou transformations à l'écran, en fonction des codes du moment, de l'idéologie, des multiples facteurs liés à l'historique ou la nature de la production, etc. est infiniment plus passionnante et enrichissante qu'une stupide comptabilité des "erreurs". C'est à travers cette étude-là que l'apparente irréconciliabilité des points de vue des historiens et des cinéphiles peut être dépassée.

M.M.W. Today's digital recording and editing equipment makes it possible that anyone dedicated enough can become a film or at least a video director. There are also numerous computer games set in antiquity, usually involving *faux-historical* conquest and empire-building. And there is the Internet. Our audiovisual technologies extend the visual storytelling of the cinema, so we should be aware of their existence and their potential, including their potential for education. A representative example is *Rome Reborn*, a 3-D digital project at the University of Virginia available on the Internet (www.romereborn.virginia.edu). It provides a virtual tour of the imperial city in 320 A.D. Still, as impressive as they are, such advances remain rather static: buildings and statues cannot move, people are usually absent. Contrast the hustle and bustle in Lester's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which shows us a set of lower-class Rome inhabited by busy peasants, artisans, and others. Filming in Spain, Lester had hired local villagers to live in this set for a time.

Filmic recreations of the past are notorious for their inaccuracies. In terms of authenticity, a site like *Rome Reborn* has the advantage over the cinema, even if it is probably not entirely error-free. (Who or what is?) In this sense, then, digital effects and media leave traditional films behind. Alternatively, they are merged with live-action filmmaking. As Petersen revealed about *Troy* in an interview: «There are a thousand ships coming towards Troy and 50,000 soldiers attacking. Even I don't know where the CG[I] starts and our extras end».

Nevertheless the cinema, especially pre-CGI cinema, possesses a considerable advantage over other visual media. A comparison of Desmond Davis's *Clash of the Titans* (1981), whose special effects were created by Ray Harryhausen, with its CGI-driven remake is revealing. The immediately obvious artifice in Harryhausen's stop-motion animation communicates the supernatural essence of myth far better than the CGI effects that make even the unreal look realistic. And who could ever forget Harryhausen's Talos in Don Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963)? Nick Willing's television remake of *Jason and the Argonauts* (2000) sensibly omits the Talos episode altogether. Were Willing's special-effects people aware that they could never come close to, much less equal, Harryhausen's achievement?

Historical epic at its best can communicate what director Anthony Mann once memorably called "the feeling of history". This feeling for the past does not entirely depend on authenticity or factual accuracy. Mann's epic films *El Cid* (1961) and *The*

Fall of the Roman Empire are among the most eloquent illustrations of his perspective. This subject is as important as it is fascinating, but it is too complex to be dealt with here. Anyone interested can find out more in my chapters *Edward Gibbon and The Fall of the Roman Empire* and *Fact, Fiction, and the Feeling of History*, both in *The Fall of the Roman Empire: Film and History*, a 2009 essay collection about Mann's epic.

Brief as it is, my discussion of CGI, video, and related media may have prompted another question about our digital, home-video, and do-it-yourself age. Now that celluloid is yielding to computer files, have we reached the end of the film era? Is the death of cinema as we, our parents, and our grandparents knew and loved it about to occur? *Di meliora!*

6) Non un'ultima domanda, ma uno spazio assolutamente libero per proporre una vostra riflessione su un tema fra i tanti che sono rimasti fuori da questo breve dialogo 'triangolare', del quale vi ringrazio ancora una volta.

La riflessione di Hervé Dumont è già contenuta nella seconda parte della risposta alla domanda n. 5 (N.d.C.)

M.M.W. Greek and Roman epic poets traditionally began with an invocation of their Muse. I would like to close with such an invocation, which is at the same time an exhortation (a gentle one, I hope). In spite of its prominence among classical-reception studies, Classics and Cinema is still a young and evolving field. It is also a broad and demanding field, one that requires a double expertise from its practitioners. Sound knowledge of most if not all aspects of the ancient cultures and close familiarity with film history, technology, theory, aesthetics, and economics are the preconditions for all serious interpretive work on cinema and antiquity. It may be true that nobody can serve two masters, but classical film philologists ought to be willing to serve no fewer than ten mistresses simultaneously. This is necessary if they want to do justice to the artistic areas over which these ladies preside. What are these domains, and who are these ladies? They are history (Clio), epic (Calliope), tragedy (Melpomene), comedy (Thalia), song and dance (Terpsichore), other kinds of poetry (Erato, Euterpe, Polyhymnia), and the cinema, which Jean Cocteau called "the tenth Muse." Naturally, these Magnificent Ten Mistresses expect to be LOVED by classical PHILOlogical cinePHILES!