

## Portrait of a Donkey: Painterly Style in Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar*

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*"[Robert Bresson] . . . would have us be concerned here not with the psychology but with the physiology of existence" (133).*

—*André Bazin, "Le Journal d'un curé de campagne and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson" (1951)*

*"Bresson's cinema is closer to painting than to photography."*

—*François Truffaut*

Although commentary on Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) has focused on the film's narrative structure,<sup>1</sup> critics invariably point to its painterly qualities. During a roundtable discussion just after the film was released, Mireille Latil-Le Dantec observes that the film "more closely resembles a non-figurative painting than Bresson's previous works."<sup>2</sup> In that same discussion Michel Estève speculates that because "painting was Bresson's first passion and has greatly influenced him," he "wanted to make a portrait" in the form of *Balthazar*.<sup>3</sup> Summarizing his interview with Bresson while the film was still being shot at Guyancourt, Paul Gilles arrives at a similar conclusion: "Bresson is not a filmmaker, he's a painter."<sup>4</sup> And according to Gilbert Salachas it is not *Balthazar*, but the characters around him who function as a collective portrait or painting.<sup>5</sup> Even Bresson himself, reflecting on the decision to use a donkey as his protagonist, confirms much of the critical conjecture: "Perhaps the idea came to me plastically because I am a painter. A donkey's head seems to me something admirable. The plasticity, no doubt."<sup>6</sup>

General Bresson studies have been similarly haunted by questions of the painterly. Robert Drouget compares Bresson's strategy of placing Balthazar at the intersection of a number of various subplots to a convention in the realist canvases of Courbet, ". . . comme l'apparition de reliefs et de hautes-pâtes."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Raymond Durnat views Bresson's style in a long line of works influenced by what he calls an Impressionist "delicacy of perception," including Cubism, as well as by the "rational introspection" of phenomenology in its Symbolist manifestations.<sup>8</sup> And Allen Thiher is not alone in noting the influence of the baroque, specifically such painters as Georges de la Tour and Phillippe de Champaigne.<sup>9</sup> Marianne Fricheau compares the use of shadows, the narrative rhythm of the fresco, and historical representation in Giotto's miniature *la Cène* and *la Pentecôte* to Bresson's *Le Diable probablement*, while Jean-Claude Rousseau lingers on stylistic affinities between Bresson and Vermeer.<sup>10</sup> However, it is a somewhat reductive comparison by René Prédal that provides the most useful starting point for this study: "Like Antonioni, Bresson practices an action painting, but if the Italian filmmaker is concerned primarily with color, the paintbrush absorbs the attention of our auteur."<sup>11</sup> Rather than concentrate on one material aspect of painting, such as color, Bresson's films focus on the brushstroke itself, suggesting a process whereby the image reflexively calls back the hand that brought it into existence.

Recent investigations of the relation between painting and cinema have taken much the same route as direct studies of Bresson: acknowledging his similarity to certain painters or styles, but not moving far beyond that preliminary nod. Pascal Bonitzer's *Décadrages* (1985) suggests parallels between the paintings of Buzzati,<sup>12</sup> while in *L'Oeil interminable* (1995) Jacques Aumont categorizes Bresson—along with Eisenstein—as one of the rare "cinéastes-peintres" of the modern cinema.<sup>13</sup> In a series of cinematic case studies of painterly influence, Angela Della Vacche's *Cinema and Painting* (1996) wistfully acknowledges in a footnote that, "an in-depth analysis of Bresson's use of art history has never been done," with the single exception of Paul Schrader's comparison to Byzantine portraiture.<sup>14</sup>

Given this range of commentary, it is surprising that no one has lingered on Bresson's use of painting, especially in comparison to the large volume of commentary on the topic with the films of Michelangelo Antonioni.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, understanding Bresson's relationship to painting is not as straightforward as providing a series of one-to-one art historical correspondences. As many of the aphorisms in *Notes sur le cinématographe* attest, Bresson's use of painting is highly

mediated. Rather than return to the iconography of Medieval Christian painting, therefore, I would like to place *Balthazar* within Bresson's own aesthetic and philosophical milieu. Important upheavals in the way painting was understood in the fifties and early sixties in Europe and the United States suggest that *Au hasard Balthazar* can best be understood as a work of cinematic portraiture. To illuminate this portrait, three interrelated approaches are taken, all of which coalesce around the question of figuration: similarities to Jackson Pollock and action painting; relations between animal awareness and artistic consciousness in the way Balthazar's eye is conflated with the mechanical lens of the camera; and parallels between *Balthazar* and phenomenology, turning to Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on aesthetics and painting.<sup>16</sup> Just as Balthazar lives on the borderland between human and object world, *Au hasard Balthazar* stands at the crossroads between cinema and painting. But rather than see *Balthazar* as simply *borrowing* from painting, I argue that the film is ontologically and thematically borne out of a specifically painterly response to questions of figuration, movement, and vision. Painterly concerns hover at the edges of Bresson studies like the phenomenological body itself. It is only by examining Bresson's cinema through the lens of painting that we can arrive at our own honest portrait of *Balthazar*.

### **Gérard as Action Painter: “Les gestes nous découvrent”**

Harold Rosenberg coined the term “action painting” in a 1952 article, “The American Action Painters.” He documents the change effected by a brand of automatic painting, specifically as performed by Jackson Pollock, from treating the canvas as a place to render a prior image to approaching it as a site for action, “so that the painting displays the event that takes place when the artist paints rather than conceal[ing] this event.”<sup>17</sup> As a result of Rosenberg's article, Barbara Rose argues that many artists decided “to forsake the two-dimensional surface of the canvas [in order] to enter the ‘arena’ of real time, real space and literal materials.”<sup>18</sup> Painting leaves the room of fixed representation and joins the “arena” of bodily movement and activity, and action painting becomes the method by which a bodily awakening can take place. In 1977 the singer Patti Smith had her own bodily awakening. She fell off-stage during a concert, cracked two vertebrae in her neck, and was bed-ridden for several months.<sup>19</sup> Appropriately enough, she watched *Au hasard Balthazar* so often during her convalescence that her mind became a “notebook of stills and annotations,” and complex

parallels emerge between *Balthazar* and the tenets of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>20</sup> In one passage she compares the moment when Gérard pours black oil onto the road to watch cars spin out of control (Figure 1) to Jackson Pollock's "No. 14." The measured, seething anger that Gérard redirects as untamed, destructive action mimics the artistic style of Pollock so closely that in her view both men are "licensed killers." Smith continues:

[Gérard's] hands, like his clothes, are covered with the extract of action-oil. like the artist he is what he does. his clothes are black and so is oil—his medium. w/it he can abstract language into the physical hieroglyphics of convergence, of blue poles . . . . gerard equates painting with a car skidding, crashing and sputtering. Like no: 11, 14 this is no accident . . . . he knows what he wants to see and controls destruction.<sup>21</sup>

Gérard is the most active character in the film, and in this sense he is its destructive artist; it is the rebellious energy that Pollock and Gérard share which ultimately becomes art. For Smith, *Balthazar* is an attempt to bring two-dimensional plastic models into active three-dimensional space, either in the case of Marie, who becomes "a living breathing work of art," or the woman in the car that skids off the road, who ". . . discover[s] her husband is a work of art."<sup>22</sup> Action painting puts the world *in movement* through a violent demolition of the traditionally flat surface, whether, in Smith's words, it is "a master pissing on the arched curls of villon," or Bresson himself, "a Frenchman [who is] the first to recognize [Pollock]."<sup>23</sup>

Toward the end of the film, we see the way Gérard turns his model into statuary when he and his gang of "blousons noirs" race from the cottage, strewing Marie's clothes across the road. The camera stays behind, peering into a window to capture the nude Marie in the form of an Ingres's odalisque (Figure 2). Crouched in a corner and twisted away from the camera eye, Marie's distended torso and fleshy lines bring to mind Ingres's *The Valpinçon Bather* (1808; Figure 3). Speaking of this scene in a *Cinématographe* interview with Jacques Fieschi, the actress Anne Wiazemsky oddly comments in third person on the way her body had been carefully positioned: "Le corps de Marie nu était celui d'un modèle des Beaux-Arts." As if underscoring the way both death and artistic representation are characterized by immobility, the next to last time we see Marie is as "the fine arts statue." In the subsequent scene, Marie's mother reveals the close relation between Bresson's own acts of figuration, movement, and visibility when she announces that Marie is, "never to be seen again." An odd complicity is

further suggested between Gérard and Bresson, the two artists who manufacture the plastic image.

Although Gérard's pose as iconoclastic outsider is clearly modeled on Jackson Pollock, it remains unclear whether Bresson is indebted to Pollock's artistic innovations, as Smith suggests, or if both artists similarly seek to explode a fixed object-representation by returning to the body's lived, transgressive state.<sup>24</sup> Art for both becomes that action which occurs outside the frame's limits or confines. To animate his canvas, Bresson relies on the motion inherent in cinematic form, while Pollock bullies paint into obeisance. Since for Pollock "the painter has become an actor,"<sup>25</sup> we might say that Bresson's actors are painters, but through the mediation of a camera that reveals their hidden movements. Each artist thus discovers his own distinctive ontological path to the same modernist reinvention of painting as a material process carried from stasis to action.

As Smith puts it, Gérard's hands are the medium by which he can create; they are the active agents of action-oil. Interestingly, Maureen Turim observes that we are first introduced not to Gérard, but rather to his hands, and that they remain a key synecdoche for him throughout the film: "[Gérard] is first seen, significantly, only by his fragmented hand, thus introducing [this] image . . . reaching into space which will figure into the later seduction sequences."<sup>26</sup> This emphasis on Gérard's hands corroborates his role as *agent provocateur* in the manufacture of the artistic product. Bresson puts it succinctly in his interview with Gilbert Salachas, examining why hands and gestures are so significant in *Balthazar*: "The hand is autonomous, our gestures, our limbs are nearly autonomous. We no longer control them."<sup>27</sup>

In the Bresson universe, limbs become automatic, mechanical functions of the body. Gesture and movement neither belong to us, nor do we control them; they are as foreign as the object world itself. He clarifies his point using a hand analogy: ". . . if your hands are on you knees, it is not you who [then] place these hands over your eyes."<sup>28</sup> Gérard represents the same embodied return as the hand/body movement of Jackson Pollock, insofar as the body's automatic behavior is captured on the canvas or the screen *before* reaching conscious understanding. Borrowing Montaigne's eloquent turn of phrase to capture the essence of his own cinematic universe, Bresson admits, "les gestes nous découvrent" ("gestures discover us").<sup>29</sup>

The best portrait of Gérard as action painter occurs during a sequence at Arnold's party: Gérard attempts to break all the glass and mirrors that surround him at the bar.<sup>30</sup> As the most

transparently self-reflective moment in the film, the process of cinematic representation is itself brought into the frame. Although shattering the flat surface brings to mind analytic cubism, Gérard's violence and aggression evoke Pollock even more strongly, who attempts to break out of any fixed representation by destroying the purely visual, inauthentic reflection. Even the way the mirror that Gérard breaks with a wine bottle has been framed by a painterly frame, which is then carefully framed by the boundaries of the cinematic frame, adds to the sense that what Gérard destroys is painting itself. In articulating the nature of Pollock's method Rosalind Krauss resorts to the same metaphor as Bresson: ". . . it is as though he had gone up to the mirror to witness his own appearing and had smashed the mirror instead."<sup>31</sup> Krauss suggests that Abstract Expressionism provides a more accurate self-portrait than classical methods of representation in the way the artist's identity is authentically interrogated. In a *Notes sur le cinématographe* epigraph, Bresson has much the same to say about cinema as self-portraiture, not only in the "model's" role as painter, but also in that what is projected is, at least in part, the artist himself facing the mirror: "Model. He paints his self-portrait with what you dictate to him (gestures, words) and the likeness, rather as if it were indeed a painting, has in it as much of you as of him."<sup>32</sup> Jean d'Yvoire adds that in *Balthazar* Bresson cannot even imagine that his characters "are anything other than an aspect of himself."<sup>33</sup>

### **Art's Well-Spring: Heidegger and *Balthazar***

Although there is much shared ground between Martin Heidegger's philosophical writings and the films of Robert Bresson, one essay in particular seems in especially close dialogue with *Balthazar*. "The Question Concerning Technology," delivered as a lecture in 1949, argues that nature has become increasingly concealed within our present technological society; it is understood exclusively as a resource, or "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*) for human consumption. As Heidegger explains using the example of farming, instead of society and earth operating in unison, earth is entirely replaced by its instrumentality as useful object: ". . . even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature . . . Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry." Due to the way science has framed

(*Gestell*) our contemporary understanding, nature is now only conceived as a “being stored” just as coal is “. . . on call to deliver the sun’s warmth that is stored in it.”<sup>34</sup>

*Au hasard, Balthazar* (1966) serves as a near perfect exemplum for the way technology obstructs nature, with Balthazar as its hero. Once removed from his maternal, grassy knoll, and baptized in a ceremony that signals his entrance into the human world, he is viewed exclusively in terms of his use-value.<sup>35</sup> He is whipped, beaten, and abused by neighboring farmers. He is equipped with horseshoes and put to work on a nearby farm. Balthazar is quite literally “set in order” and “used up,” like the field he plows. Yet despite attempts to reduce him to the “*instrumentum*,”<sup>36</sup> he escapes early in the narrative when his hay cart overturns and he runs from a crowd of angry farmers with pitchforks. He retreats to the property of his youth, now in a state of disrepair and neglect by Jacques’ father, suggesting an existence beyond the limits of what Heidegger terms human “care.” In this respect, the farm is in the same expired state as Balthazar: a form of “retrograde ridicule,” in the words of Marie’s father. Moreover, the high iron fence encircling the land firmly delineates the protected sphere of nature, where Marie announces to her father that nothing “belongs” to anyone, from the threatening roar of technology just beyond its gates, literally figured a few scenes later when Gérard and his gang race their engines just outside its bars. Gérard’s aim is to enter and ultimately deplete this sheltered, natural reserve inhabited as well as characterized by Balthazar and Marie.

*Balthazar* bears witness to the fluctuating conflict between nature and technology. Gérard appears on one side as *technē*, while Balthazar remains at the remove of *physis*. As Heidegger clarifies, *physis* is a bringing-forth in itself, such as “the bursting of a blossom into a bloom” while *technē* is a bringing-forth through the secondary remove of craftsman or artist.<sup>37</sup> But whereas Bresson seeks a notion of *technē* as close as possible to the natural bringing-forth of *physis*—the Greek notion of handicraft Heidegger commends—Gérard is seduced by the purely technological. The first scene between Balthazar and Gérard makes this dynamic clear when Gérard and his gang, riding motor scooters and bicycles, surround the antiquated carriage lead by Balthazar, and Gérard and Louis sarcastically announce their contempt for the outmoded donkey:

Gérard: Chouette un âne.

Louis: C’est rapide.

Gérard: Moderne.

The most poetic illustration of the divide between technology and nature comes near the end of the film after Arnold's extravagant party sequence. Just before dropping to an earthy demise, Arnold peers into the firmament as if searching for God. Instead, Arnold's goodbye is addressed to a tangled web of power lines that tower above him. What could be more dramatic than this reenactment of the human body's final descent from those staggering heights where power is controlled and regulated as electricity? Although less dramatic, Gérard's radio equally illustrates the way energy is conserved and placed at Gérard's beckon call as "standing-reserve."<sup>38</sup> As Heidegger reports: "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering."<sup>39</sup> Rather than adapting to physis, the world must be brought to, and placed within, Gérard's technological *Gestell* in the fashion of humanity itself. As useful as Patti Smith's comparison is between Gérard and Jackson Pollock, Heidegger now exposes Gérard as a counterfeit, seduced by the groundless world of technology.

The quintessential manifestation of "standing-reserve" in *Balthazar* is money, since it establishes a system of equivalence in which the material object is replaced by its resource value. Money determines how much use-value a particular object holds for man. By setting Balthazar's tail on fire, Gérard attempts to increase Balthazar's value, since he will then follow Gérard's commands and deliver bread, making more money for the bakery. Within the economic network, Balthazar circulates better, even if the motor scooter is ultimately a more efficient model. While Balthazar resists technology, Gérard instead becomes increasingly reliant on it as the film progresses, thanks to the gifts of a radio and motor scooter from his guardian, the owner of the boulangerie who controls the "key" to financial exchange at the money drawer. For the grain merchant, Balthazar's resource value may be more antiquated, but just as mercenary: pumping water from the well to produce bottles of Vittel. Marie seems to speak for Balthazar when she refuses the merchant's money in exchange for sex, explaining that what she seeks instead is friendship. Much like the volume control on Gérard's radio, Balthazar's work is stored at the grain-merchant's fingertips whenever he turns on the spigot. Bresson makes clear that Balthazar exists within the human world only insofar as he has hidden reserves that can still be extracted. To exist is to produce. One of the many ironies of *Balthazar* is that Arnold, a character who has



had little or no use-value throughout the film, inherits a fortune, thoroughly bypassing the system of exchange, and illustrating its ultimate groundlessness.<sup>40</sup>

Notwithstanding Patti Smith's prescient comments on *Balthazar*, direct reference is made to action painting, as several critics have discussed.<sup>41</sup> The sequence begins with the increasingly loud roar of a waterfall. We then see two men, one riding Balthazar and one on another donkey, as they cross the parched, rocky ground. They have the following conversation:

Man 1: And then, a multitude of structures of which I am not the master leap out of my canvas, each one carrying a dialectic. It is not the waterfall that I grasp, but what the waterfall dictates to me without any logical relation to it. Its fall puts me in movement.

Man 2: A cerebral painting? A thought painting?

Man 1: A painting of action, action painting.<sup>42</sup>

In "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," Merleau-Ponty recounts a similar process for Renoir, who mysteriously sets his easel next to the ocean to create *The Bathers*, although the figured group in question swims in a brook. Both artists suggest that what is most important is the response that the natural object evokes in them, and that what puts the artist in motion is his or her own animated exchange between what Heidegger terms the primordial "earth" and the human "world." As Heidegger illustrates using C. F. Meyer's poem "Roman Fountain," the subject of art is its own process of returning to this primal *Ursprung*. Because the open region finds its greatest resistance in the self-contained earth, the earth is ". . . where the figure must be fixed in place."<sup>43</sup> (69). Consequently, the way Marie, Balthazar and Arnold are defined by their passive resistance to the activities of world imitates the work's own movement, since they are its products. Action painting can be seen as the purest example of such "earthly" resistance, since it attempts to return to an originary ground *before* the frame is set, and emphasizes the tumult between earth, which sheds all signification, and world, where meaning is anchored. The relationship between earth and world is reproduced in Merleau-Ponty's distinction between vision and motor skills, where the stable world of vision is repeatedly undercut by the earthly movement of the body.

Wayne Froman sketches the implications of a Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology for visual art. Froman views action painting as precisely the attempt, described by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, to move beyond a detached Renaissance perspective in which

the subject is placed in a fixed position before making sense of the surrounding world. In “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger claims that this methodology begins *within* its own scientific system, rather than from any lived experience, producing a “world-as-picture.” In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty levels a similar critique against Descartes, claiming a constant tension for the “lived body” between the field of vision and the field of motor projects. Merleau-Ponty that he terms “reversibility.”<sup>44</sup> As a result, Froman sees action painting as an articulation of the struggle between the artist’s bodily movement and his or her vision. His primary example is Willem de Kooning’s series of “Woman” paintings: “. . . the features of the painting . . . are no longer apprehended as elements in a configuration that is taking shape, but rather are temporary resolutions of strains or tension in the painter’s perceptual field, resolutions that give way to other strains or tensions.”<sup>45</sup> In Heideggerian terms, de Kooning’s ongoing struggle between earth and world perpetually rewrites the emerging figure. In Froman’s own words, by making motion the subject of the painting, “. . . action painting ‘looks for’ the dynamic in which the art of painting originates.”<sup>46</sup> The expression “looks for” suggests that action painting is a reflexive turning inward to explore the unknown process of its own coming into existence. Similarly, *Au hasard, Balthazar* moves away from narrative predictability and toward honest self-portraiture. The characters are therefore under the same spell as the bodies of an action painting where truth is determined by the movement of inhuman, earthly forces.

### **Animal Perception**

What so intrigued Bresson about the biblical tale involving Balaam’s small donkey is that the animal was capable of *sensing* the presence of an angel that its master could not see.<sup>47</sup> Although Balaam occupies the advanced strata of human understanding and language, his donkey is the one capable of communicating with the angel. Consequently, Bresson sees animal consciousness as having a more profound intelligence, subsequently lost in human exchange. Jean Semolué elaborates on such a tantalizing suggestion: “Balthazar also seems to perceive a secret of which his owners take no notice. However, he will die alone; humans have not seen or heard anything.”<sup>48</sup> Semolué implies that because Balthazar experiences what others cannot, he dies outside the physical limits of human sensory awareness. His solitary death in the forbidden borderlands of the Pyrenees symbolizes his secret ability to go further than human perception allows.

Or are there some humans who *can* reach the uncharted netherworld of animal perception? Bresson is fascinated by the intuitive rapport between idiot and donkey in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Although both characters are viewed by society as lacking the ability to reason and communicate, for Bresson they are, "the most delicate and intelligent of all."<sup>49</sup> Bresson describes the moment of profound communication between them: hearing the donkey bray, the idiot triumphantly replies, "Voilà, j'ai compris!" By reaching the depths of animal consciousness, the idiot achieves higher levels of perception. A subtle complicity similarly develops between narrator and "idiot" in *Balthazar*, since by allowing his story to be controlled by Balthazar, Bresson captures the mechanical activity of the body described by Froman and Rosenberg. Although Balthazar's "stupid" animal qualities result in his abuse and exploitation, such qualities enable him to maintain a freshness and sensitivity to the object world. The donkey thus represents that same automatism for the viewer as the waterfall for the painter, that which emanates from within earth and exists beyond the limits of human comprehension. Given the relation between the ontology of the artistic work and the natural vision of the idiot-animal, Bresson thus suggests that art is the return to a pre-conscious moment when purity of vision is possible; Balthazar's animal "naturalness" renders the invisible visible to human cognition.

In the Jackson Pollock chapter of *The Optical Unconscious*, Krauss discusses the significance of Pollock's *She Wolf* (1943, Figure 4). What this painting captures, Krauss writes, is the beginning of Pollock's voyage beyond culture by slowly dissolving the figure itself:

But what was lower than both the pictorial image and the cultural plane of writing was, it could be seen, the floor, the ground, the beneathness of the truly horizontal. That was lower. That was out of the field of vision and out of the cultural surface of writing and onto a plane that was manifestly below both, below the body.<sup>50</sup>

We might just as soon ask why Pollock used an animal to represent this lowering beneath language and figuration as why Bresson's tale is silently narrated by a donkey. *She Wolf* is the precursor to *Balthazar* insofar as animality is troped as a return to non-representation. For both artists the animal is a way to comment on the aims and strategies of their own artistic processes. Bresson admits as much in his interview with Godard: "I wanted this animal to be, even in so far as it is an animal, a raw material."<sup>51</sup> *Balthazar* and *She Wolf* represent a return from the world to

the raw, unformed materials of the earth—water, rock, and wood—in their natural, closed state before “world” intervenes.<sup>52</sup> The intermediary stage between Pollock’s savage wolf and Bresson’s silent donkey might be Robert Rauschenberg’s 1955-59 sculpture *Monogram* (Figure 5), which presents a goat’s body wrapped within a tire and placed on what Rauschenberg calls a “pasture.” Animal horns batter through the human confines of a one-dimensional canvas and rise into three-dimensional space, breaking through the meditative, fixed distance between work and spectator much like the aggressive movement of an action painting.

At the heart of both Pollock and Bresson’s work is their attempt to move closer to a material object-world, and the sympathetic characters in *Balthazar* embody the same relationship to the natural world. Arnold, whom Jean Semolué describes as exhibiting a lyricism, a naturalness, and an intelligence that goes far beyond those who find him contemptible is no doubt modeled on that same idiot who achieves revelation in communication with his donkey.<sup>53</sup> Arnold’s reactions are impulsive, physical sallies against the world: he almost never speaks, he is tormented by Gérard’s band of blousons noirs, and he is a drunkard. Alcohol becomes Arnold’s waterfall both literally and figuratively, since it reduces him to the same animal-like proximity to objects as Balthazar. Thus, the sequence of Arnold in front of the gushing waterfall is directly followed by his statement, “I will never drink again,” and his subsequent retreat to a bar where he mechanically downs several glasses of wine. The waterfall of unseen, forgotten action consumes and drowns him.

In elaborating on the qualities that Arnold and Balthazar share, Bresson also elaborates on his own directorial method:

ils ont en commun une certaine sensibilité aux choses. Et cela, on peut-être le trouver chez certains animaux très sensibles aux objets—or vous savez qu’un animal peut broncher, faire un écart à la vue d’un objet. C’est donc que les objets comptent tout de même beaucoup pour les animaux, plus, parfois, que pour nous, qui en avons l’habitude et qui, malheureusement, n’y faisons pas toujours attention.<sup>54</sup>

Both Arnold and Balthazar are more aware of the object world than most humans who, Bresson laments, do not pay attention to their physical environment. Merleau-Ponty discusses a very similar process in “Le doute de Cézanne”: Cézanne attempts to restore our sentient body to the object world from which we have lost contact. Bresson’s notion of animal consciousness is

therefore very similar to what Merleau-Ponty describes as artistic consciousness: an attempt to return to the lost treasures of a pure object world.

### **Narrative Continuity and the Cinema-Animal Eye**

Although commentary on *Au hasard Balthazar* often comments on Bresson's allusions to the Bible and to Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* as clues to the film's iconography, painterly influences have largely been neglected. Michel Estève notes in an interview with Bresson that the latter suggested Antoin Watteau's *Gilles* (1721) as an important influence on *Balthazar* (Figure 6).<sup>55</sup> *Gilles* was uncharacteristic of Watteau. For one, the painting was one of his largest, an almost life-size reproduction at 72¼" x 58¾." For another, the work was displayed outside the typical circles of art exhibition.<sup>56</sup> Although Watteau was known for his exaggerated commedia dell'arte figures, *Gilles* ". . . awes us by the power of its affirmation of a real, human presence in the world of theatrical fantasy."<sup>57</sup> We might say much the same for Bresson's efforts through *Balthazar* to overturn the inflated theatricality that corrupts pure cinematic expression.

Posner argues that *Gilles* is a clear antecedent to Jean-Baptiste Pater's *The Comedian's March*, since thematically the two works are nearly identical: the same group of commedia dell'arte figures travel through the countryside and momentarily stop to perform for spectators.<sup>58</sup> But while Pater's parade continues across the canvas, lead by an anthropomorphized, clownish donkey, *Gilles* is as suspended as the frozen eye of his donkey. The other characters in the background, especially the Captain in his bright red hat and jacket, try to move the donkey forward. However, *Gilles* and the donkey are removed from the activities of the other characters and stare directly at the spectator. It is as if direct eye contact with the viewer, especially in the case of the donkey's anchored gaze, not only prevents the parade's forward motion, but also the cohesive narrative achieved in Pater's original. Such an effect does not seem so different from the eye of *Balthazar*, which slows narrative progression to the point of stasis, almost beyond the limits of plot. And it is *Balthazar*'s body, like the donkey in *Gilles*, which seems to hinder forward-moving activity. Michel Estève puts this lack of development another way when he observes that characters in *Balthazar*, ". . . do not evolve, but one mustn't forget that Bresson wanted to make a portrait."<sup>59</sup>

But *Balthazar* is both unmoving eye and, as witnessed in the series of shots of *Balthazar*'s feet during the waterfall sequence, the character on whom the plot seems to rest. Just as Arnold's

fall from *Balthazar* into death is a literal fall off the donkey's back, so the plot often seems carried on Balthazar's legs. When Balthazar lies down at the end of the film, it is not only his own death that is prefigured, but also his ability to carry *Balthazar* any further. The only other time Balthazar is shown laying down is in the near-death scene in which he is rescued from the sledgehammer by Arnold and undergoes a rebirth at "la source." Through Balthazar's movement, we see just how closely Balthazar's consciousness is linked to the film's narrative movement. Bresson invokes a similar technique in *Lancelot du lac* (1974) by framing the film with the eye of a horse. At the beginning, a lengthy shot concentrates on the horse's large brown eye as he stands, but near the end of the film the now dead horse lays splayed across the ground like many knights, an arrow through his neck adjacent to that eye. In both cases, Bresson finds a similarity between animal eye and camera lens, since the cinematic event ends either when animal consciousness ends, or when the animal's legs can no longer carry the camera eye forward.

In Heideggerian terms, the animal fully melts back into earth. In this respect, Henry Moore's sculpture *Sheep Piece* (1971-72; Figure 8) emerges from such a similar relationship between art work and animal consciousness that it can be considered *Balthazar's* legitimate heir. The sculpture was installed in a pasture, where sheep congregate for shelter. In an opposite fashion to Balthazar's final demise (Figure 9), *Sheep Piece* perpetually rises out of the earth, defined in the way it participates in the activities of the animal world. Yet, the final scene of *Balthazar* similarly presents a world of dogs, sheep and a donkey so removed from all human activity that the animals seem to freely interact and communicate among themselves. A herd of sheep moves across a distant hill and huddles around the dying figure of Balthazar, much as sheep gather around the entwined legs of Moore's sculpture. Both works grow out of those grassy pastures at the frontier of human occupation, a land where narrative causality is suspended.

As suggested, it is not only Balthazar who possesses a remarkable ability to capture the invisible perceptions that escape human awareness, but the camera as well. When Bresson boasts of the latter's distinctive abilities, he could very well be speaking of Balthazar: "The camera can register things that our eye cannot, or more likely, that our mind cannot. What astonishes me is that the mind only shows us the tricks, falsifies what the camera authentically presents."<sup>60</sup> The camera functions in a similar way to animal consciousness, since it mechanically captures every detail of activity without recourse to conscious understanding.<sup>61</sup> Unencumbered by rational

consciousness, the eye of the camera and Balthazar see and hear what humans cannot. Maureen Turim speculates that this ontological complicity between cinematic form and animal perception is most pronounced in the slow exchange of stares between Balthazar and the caged zoo animals, where we are most strongly reminded of the animal-human opposition running throughout the film.<sup>62</sup> But the critic to have made the most provocative connection between the inhuman and impersonal eye of Balthazar and Bresson's camera lens is Marie-Claire Wuillemier, in no less than one poetic breath: "calm, passive eye of an elephant or a donkey, eye that looks without seeing, registers without interpreting, image of an ideally inhuman camera."<sup>63</sup> Wuillemier brings Merleau-Ponty forcefully into focus, since the phenomenological eye is precisely the mechanism that watches without consciously seeing, that never becomes detached from the sensorial experience. But Wuillemier's use of the word "idéalement" questions the feasibility of creating an inhuman camera eye. She suggests that arriving at the fully automatic through art is ultimately an ideal stance rather than a real possibility.

### **Conclusion: Embodied Vision or Becoming-Donkey?**

Marie-Claire Wuillemier's ideal camera-animal eye has troubling implications: Bresson, like Merleau-Ponty, creates a sacred, non-human refuge that stands as the convenient antithesis of all things human.<sup>64</sup> An alternative, more redemptive escape route for *Balthazar* is mapped out by Gilles Deleuze's post-phenomenological and anti-humanist project. For Deleuze and Felix Guattari, an artistic "becoming-animal" is a political act in which the artist detaches him or herself from the socius to explore new creative possibilities, at the same time that his or her characters are released from stifling human relations.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Kafka's attempts to transform his identity through writing is thematized as an animal metamorphosis in his stories, just as *Balthazar's* aesthetic relies on the similarity between artistic creation and animal perception. It is in this respect that both artists strive toward the non-human, in an explosion of energy and movement that Deleuze and Guattari term a "line of flight." Bresson's performance of a "becoming-donkey" thus offers the promise of a more liberating and non-essentialist reading of *Au hasard Balthazar*.

I remain unconvinced, however, that Bresson's donkey embodies the kind of fantastic lines of flight and proliferating inhuman multitudes suggested by Deleuze and Guattari's vitalist readings. In fact, from the moment of his Christian baptism, Balthazar becomes an individuated

human subject seldom capable of spirited rebellion. It is for this reason that I turn to phenomenology as the most appropriate model by which Bresson's conception of the animal can be understood: as a mechanical camera eye, rather than a trope of proliferating desire. Ultimately, it is the secret sharing between phenomenology and the wanderings of Balthazar, organized around a post-war painterly conception of figuration and the primal ground of animal perception, that provides the most valuable optic into Bresson's high modernist aesthetic.



Figure 1. Gérard dripping oil on road





Figure 2. Marie Posed as an Ingres's Odalisque  
*Valpinçon Bather* (1808)



Figure 3. Ingres's *The*



Figure 4. Jackson Pollock's *The She Wolf* (1943)



Figure 5. Robert Rauschenberg's *Monogram* (1955-59)



Figure 6. Antoin Watteau's *Gilles* (1721)  
circus



Figure 7. Balthazar at the



Figure 8. Henry Moore's *Sheep Piece* (1971-72)  
surrounded by sheep



Figure 9. Balthazar's death,  
surrounded by sheep

<sup>1</sup> A cursory glance at the titles of *Balthazar* studies shows an abiding interest in Bresson's narrative syntax among U.S. scholars in the mid-1970's: P. Adam Sitney's "The Rhetoric of Robert Bresson" (1975); Maureen Turim's "The Textual System of *Au Hazard Balthazar*" (1975); Nick Browne's, "Narrative Point of View: The Rhetoric of *Au hasard, Balthazar*" (1977); and Lindley Hanlon's more recent "From Paradox to Allegory: The Movement of the Narrative in *Au hasard, Balthazar*" (1986).

<sup>2</sup> "Au hasard, Balthazar" *La Table ronde* 222-223 (Juillet-Août 1966), p. 115. A roundtable discussion on the film between Mireille Latil-le Dantec, Michel Estève, Stanislas Fumet, and Jean d'Yvoire. The original reads: ". . . ressemble plus à un tableau non figuratif qu'à ce que Bresson a fait autrefois." All translations are my own, with the original of difficult or subtle passages included in a footnote.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 94, 108.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilles, "Robert Bresson: une patience d'âne" (*Arts* 3 Nov.), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Salachas, "A propos de *Au hasard Balthazar*: Pour le plaisir d'écouter et de regarder Robert Bresson" *Téléciné* 131 (Dec.), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> "La Question: entretien avec Robert Bresson par Jean-Luc Godard et Michel Delahaye." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 178 (May 1966), p. 70. The original reads: "L'idée est venue, peut-être, plastiquement. Car je suis peintre. Une tête d'âne me semble, à moi, quelque chose d'admirable. La plastique, sans doute."

<sup>7</sup> Robert Drouget. *Robert Bresson. Premier plan*, no. 42 (Lyon: Société d'Etudes, Recherches et documentations cinématographiques, 1966), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Durnat, "The Negative Vision of Robert Bresson," *Robert Bresson*, ed. James Quandt (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1998), pp. 429, 445.

<sup>9</sup> Allen Thiher, "Bresson's *Un condamné à mort*: The Semiotics of Grace," *Robert Bresson*, ed. James Quandt (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1998), pp. 223-234.

<sup>10</sup> Marianne Fricheau, "Le Diable dans la lumière de Giotto: deux petits tableaux et le film de Robert Bresson *Le Diable probablement*," *Robert Bresson* (Turin: Canale, 1989), pp. 63-69, and in the same publication, Jean-Claude Rousseau, "Bresson, Vermeer," pp. 72-75.

<sup>11</sup> René Prédal, "L'aventure intérieure." *L'avant-scène* 408/409 (Jan.-Feb. 1992), p. 24. The original reads: "Comme Antonioni, Bresson pratique une peinture en action, mais si le cinéaste italien s'attache surtout aux couleurs, c'est le trait qui retient davantage l'attention de notre auteur."

<sup>12</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, *Décadrages* (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1985), pp. 82-83.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Aumont, *L'oeil interminable: cinéma et peinture* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Séguier, 1995), p. 220.

<sup>14</sup> Angela Dalle Vacche, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 253, note 15. Although Schrader's chapter on Bresson in *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1972) offers insight into Bresson's "transcendental style," the brief section on Byzantine iconography is unconvincing. It seems problematic, given Bresson's passionate concern with bodily movement, sound, and sensation, that Byzantine icons should be ". . . stylized, rigid, [and] hierarchical, further and further apart from the world of verisimilitude and sensation," until finally ". . . climb[ing] away from the alluring world of the senses" (98).

<sup>15</sup> It helps that Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1963) takes its title directly from a Matisse canvas. Still, the number of studies to compare this film alone to works of modern art is staggering. Angela Della Vacche's "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*" finds parallels to De Chirico, F. T. Marinetti's mechanical man, Simon Rodia, Mario Sironi, Giacometti's *City Square*, Georges Braque, and Piet Mondrian. Other comparisons include works by Matisse (Tinazzi, *Antonioni*); Alberto Burri (Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present*); Jean Dubuffet (Carlo, *Michelangelo Antonioni: Il Deserto rosso*); and the Art Informal movement (Robert Benayoun and Roger Taillieur, *Antonioni*).

<sup>16</sup> For an introduction to the complex relationship between animal representation and phenomenology, see "L'Animal" edition of *Alter: Revue de phenomenology* 3 (1995), which includes three previously untranslated German essays by Husserl from 1933-34 on the animal. Merleau-Ponty's meditation on animal existence from his 1956-59 lecture course have been reprinted as *La Nature: Notes, cours du Collège du France* (Paris: Seuil, 1995). In addition, Elizabeth de Fontenay devotes chapters to Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in her sweeping study of the central role played by the animal in the history of philosophy. See *Le Silence des bêtes: la philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action," *Artworks and Packages* (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 343.

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Rose, "Namuth's Photographs and the Pollock Myth," p. 67

<sup>19</sup> Jane Sloan, *Robert Bresson: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), p. 87. Sloan erroneously claims 1968 as the year of Smith's accident instead of 1977 when she fell from a stage in Tampa, Florida.

<sup>20</sup> Patti Smith, *Babel* (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1974), p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130. Charles Barr's point is so similar one wonders if he and Patti Smith discussed the film: "The crash is not something that happens 'outside' [Gérard] and might thus in the last analysis or judgment be held not to belong to him. The oil and his clothes are black. He *is* what he does." "*Au hasard, Balthazar—Balthazar*," *The Films of Robert Bresson* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Nor should we discount an even more direct reference to the gangs of "blousons noirs" sweeping across France from 1957-59, which Antoine de Baecque perceptively connects in style and energy to the Nouvelle Vague. Certainly this conflation of the sociological and cinematic Nouvelle Vague runs through Bresson's film, with Gérard embodying in part the rebellious spirit of François Truffaut, the angriest of the young Turks. See Antoine de Baecque, *La Nouvelle Vague: Portrait d'une jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 47-48.

<sup>25</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action," *Artworks and Packages* (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Maureen Turim's unpublished Master's thesis, "The Textual System of *Au hasard, Balthazar*" (UW Madison, 1975), p. 100, plots each shot in a series of meticulous graphs that resemble a musical score. Drawing on Roland Barthes' *S/Z*, Turim claims that *Balthazar* can be viewed as a semiotic "écriture."

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert Salachas. "A propos de *Au hasard Balthazar*: Pour le palisir d'écouter et de regarder Robert Bresson" *Téléciné* 131 (Dec.), p. 7. For Heidegger, Dasein's basic character for understanding space in everydayness is quite literally that which is "at hand" (*Zuhanden*): "Here, apriority means the previousness of encountering space (as region) in the actual encountering of things at hand in the surrounding world" (*Being and Time* 103). Examples are frequent, from the function of gloves (101), to the reinterpretation of Kant's notion of moving furniture from the right to the left side of a dark room (101). Much remains to be said about the parallels between Heidegger's *a priori* present-at-hand world of everydayness and the perceptual universe of *Balthazar*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* ". . . si vous avez les mains sur vos genoux, ce n'est pas vous qui avez mis les mains sur vos yeux."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Nick Browne provides an insightful analysis of this scene with accompanying stills in "Narrative Point of View: The Rhetoric of *Au Hasard, Balthazar*," *Film Quarterly* 31 (Fall 1977): 19-31.

<sup>31</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 260.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997), p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> "Au hasard, Balthazar" *La Table ronde* 222-223 (Juillet-Août 1966), p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 297.

<sup>35</sup> Within the Aristotelian four-part schema of causes that Heidegger summarizes, Balthazar's baptism would be classified as "*the causa finalis*, the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the chalice required is determined as to its form and matter" ("The Question Concerning Technology" 289). But what Bresson and Heidegger emphasize is a deeper-level of "bringing-forth" that lacks all causality or instrumentality, and is troped as earth.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>38</sup> Prefiguring the later technology essay, in an early chapter of *Being and Time* (Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY, 1996) Heidegger illustrates Dasein's tendency to move toward nearness, with a less pessimistic final judgment on radio's power: "All kinds of increasing speed which we are more or less compelled to go along with today push for overcoming distance. With the 'radio,' for example, Da-sein is bringing about today de-distancing of the 'world' which is unforeseeable in its meaning for Da-sein, by way of expanding and destroying the everyday surrounding world" (98).

<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 298.

<sup>40</sup> Bresson was certainly aware of Georges Bataille's theory of the *dépense*, or "use-value" of the spendthrift. Such a reading fits well with the character of the grain merchant, played by the well-known Nietzsche and Marquis de Sade scholar Pierre Klossowski. Moreover, Bataille's profane/sacred dichotomy is realized in the struggle between the profane lives of Gerard's gang or the grain merchant and the divine intoxication of Marie or Balthazar (Georges Bataille, *Literature of Evil* (New York: Urizen Books, 1957), p. 9). Nevertheless, Bresson's restraint ultimately seems to share little with Bataille's bodily excesses. See Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-39*, ed. Allen Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1985), 116-129. In personal communication, Jacques Aumont has suggested that Maurice Blanchot may have played a central role in introducing Bresson to the work of Bataille and Heidegger.

<sup>41</sup> See especially, Charles Barr, "Au hasard, Balthazar," *The Films of Robert Bresson*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Praeger, 1969) pp. 106-116; Lindley Hanlon, "From Paradox to Allegory: The Movement of the Narrative in *Au hasard, Balthazar*," *Fragments: Bresson's Film Style* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986); and P. Adams Sitney, "The Rhetoric of Robert Bresson," *The Essential Cinema* (New York: Anthology Film Archives and New York UP, 1975), pp. 182-207.

<sup>42</sup> "Man 1: Et puis, jaillissent sur ma toile une multitude de structures dont je ne suis pas le maître et comportant chacune une dialectique. Ce n'est pas la cascade que je vise mais ce qu'elle me dictera. D'ailleurs sans aucun rapport logique avec elle. Sa chute me mettra en mouvement.

Man 2: Une peinture cérébral? Une peinture de pensée?

Man 1: Une peinture d'action, 'action painting.'"

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Wayne J. Froman, "Action Painting and the World as Picture," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (Summer 1988), p. 473.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>47</sup> "La Question: entretien avec Robert Bresson par Jean-Luc Godard et Michel Delahaye." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 178 (May 1966), p. 68.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Semolué, "L'émminente dignité des humbles," *Esprit* (June 1966), p. 1251. "Balthazar lui aussi semble voir un secret qui échappe à ses maîtres. Cependant, il mourra seul; les hommes n'ont rien vu, rien entendu."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>51</sup> "La Question: entretien avec Robert Bresson par Jean-Luc Godard et Michel Delahaye." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 178 (May 1966), p. 70. "J'ai voulu que cet animal soit, même en tant qu'animal, une matière brute."

<sup>52</sup> In *The Postmodern Animal* (2000), Steven Baker contends that given modernism's formalist nature, the animal disappears from the "twentieth-century's most adventurous and imaginative visual art" (20). He concludes: "The modern animal is thus the nineteenth-century animal (symbolic, sentimental), which has been *made to disappear*" (21-22). Although he distinguishes between what critics have said about the modern animal and what it actually does in art works of the time, drawing on examples from Marc, Pollock, and Brancusi (20-21), Baker ultimately rejects a "modern animal." While there may be legitimate differences between the modern and postmodern animal, it is not clear from Baker's study how they could be distinguished. For instance, Robert Rachenberg's *Monogram* is labeled postmodern, although it was made from 1955 to 1957.

<sup>53</sup> Jean Semolué, "Les personnages de Robert Bresson." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 75 (Oct. 1957): 13.

<sup>54</sup> "La Question: entretien avec Robert Bresson par Jean-Luc Godard et Michel Delahaye." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 178 (May 1966), p. 31. "What [Arnold and Balthazar] have in common is a certain sensitivity to things. One can perhaps find this tendency among certain animals that are very sensitive to objects—but, you know that an animal can flinch or move away upon seeing an object. This is because objects have a lot of value for animals, more, sometimes, than for us, who become accustomed to objects, and who, unfortunately, do not always pay attention."

<sup>55</sup> "Au hasard, Balthazar" *La Table ronde* 222-223 (Juillet-Août 1966), p. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), p. 270.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>59</sup> "Au hasard, Balthazar" *La Table ronde* 222-223 (Juillet-Août 1966), p. 108.

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<sup>60</sup> Gilbert Salachas, "A propos de *Au hasard Balthazar*: Pour le palisir d'écouter et de regarder Robert Bresson" *Téléciné* 131 (Dec.), p. 8. "[La camera] . . . capable d'enregistrer des choses que notre l'oeil n'est pas capable d'enregistrer, ou plutôt que notre esprit n'enregistre pas, on ne nous montre que de truqué, du falsifié, c'est ça qui m'étonne."

<sup>61</sup> In another interview Bresson underscores the ontological similarity between camera and animal eye in calling the camera "a miracle" to human understanding, a sensor that detects any trace of the false: "Mais alors, n'allons pas mettre cet acteur faux devant une caméra qui est un miracle, et qui prend des choses que ni votre oeil, ni votre oreille ne peuvent prendre. Pourquoi lui donner du falsifié? Donnez-lui du vrai!" See "La Question: entretien avec Robert Bresson par Jean-Luc Godard et Michel Delahaye." *Cahiers du Cinéma* 178 (May 1966), p. 68.

<sup>62</sup> Maureen Turim, "The Textual System of *Au hasard, Balthazar*" (M.A. Thesis, UW Madison, 1975), pp. 143-44. For a relevant discussion of the ontological similarities between photographic image and animal, see Akira Lippit, "Animetaphors: Photography, Cryptonymy, Film," *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 162-197. Parallels can be seen in the work of Bresson's contemporary Roberto Rossellini, who was fascinated by the relation between cinema movement and animal stasis. *The Machine that Kills Bad People* (1948) concerns a photographer who, by taking a photograph of a living animal, is able to completely immobilize and "kill" it. He chooses a donkey to try out his new machine, linking photographic immobility to the already "dead" animal. His experiments with humans are not nearly so successful in bring either catatonic stasis or immediate death.

<sup>63</sup> Marie-Claire Wuilleumier, "Ou : un mauvais reve ?" *Esprit* (June 1966), p. 1254. ". . . oeil calme, impassible d'un éléphant ou d'un âne, oeil que regarde sans voir, enregistre sans interpréter, image d'une caméra idéalement inhumaine."

<sup>64</sup> In concentrating on the human negotiation of subject and object, mind and eye, however, Merleau-Ponty suggests that a full return to the animal is impossible. Cézanne, after all, inaugurates a way of seeing between natural and human worlds. The work of Merleau-Ponty, paralleling Heidegger's distinction between earth and world, tempers the extent to which Balthazar can legitimately return to a pure object world. In this respect, perhaps Balthazar is nothing other than a portrait of that same motion or movement toward the natural.

<sup>65</sup> See, in particular, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.