

Word and Image : Paris in three films of Henri Jeanson

Introduction

In consideration of the long tradition within film research of largely ignoring dialogue in favour of image, my research aimed to examine the relationship between dialogue and image by considering *dialoguiste* Henri Jeanson as a writer of popular Paris. I aimed to determine how Jeanson was able to utilise the newly available use of sound and therefore dialogue in film at the time to create a sense of working class Parisian identity.

Aims

- ⇒ To critically evaluate Jeanson's contribution to *Hôtel du Nord* as well as *Lady Paname* and *Pépé le Moko*
- ⇒ To test methods of analysing dialogue in relation to visual aspects of cinema, especially performance and *mise en scène*



Methods of Research

I was able to travel to Paris to undertake my research at the Cinémathèque française, where I had access to an array of primary and secondary resources. There I:

- ⇒ Used the library search engine to find sources such as magazines and books relating to Henri Jeanson's work, his character itself as well as general works on the role of dialogue in contemporary cinema
- ⇒ Selected which sources out of those I had found were most relevant by skimming their content
- ⇒ Copied materials that I felt would be most useful to take back to Newcastle and analyse more closely

When I returned to Newcastle, due to the vast quantity of written sources I had obtained, I had to further cut down the material I had so that only the information that was directly related to my research and was most important remained.

From this selected material, I was able to highlight crucial points and slowly form a rounded, well informed opinion on my research title.

Sources

- 1) Personal photo belonging to Mandy Williams showing the entrance of the Cinémathèque Française, Paris
- 2) and 3) Personal photos taken by Mandy Williams of a handwritten screenplays for *Hôtel du Nord*
- 4) Personal photo taken by Mandy Williams of the Canal St Martin in Paris
- 5) Michel Simon walks across the Canal S.Martin bridge, "L'Atalante" <https://www.flickr.com/photos/beatpiknik/200137735/in/photostream/>
- 6) Personal photo taken by Mandy Williams of the Hôtel du Nord today
- 7) and 8) Stills from *Hôtel du Nord* (1938) http://www.club-rotary.com/club_contact/club_contact_12/Martin.html
- 9) Personal photo taken by Mandy Williams of a typed copy of the Hôtel du Nord script found in the archives at the Cinémathèque française
- 10) Page 22, Moussé, C. 1999. Henri Jeanson. 1st ed. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy.

Key sources used in research:

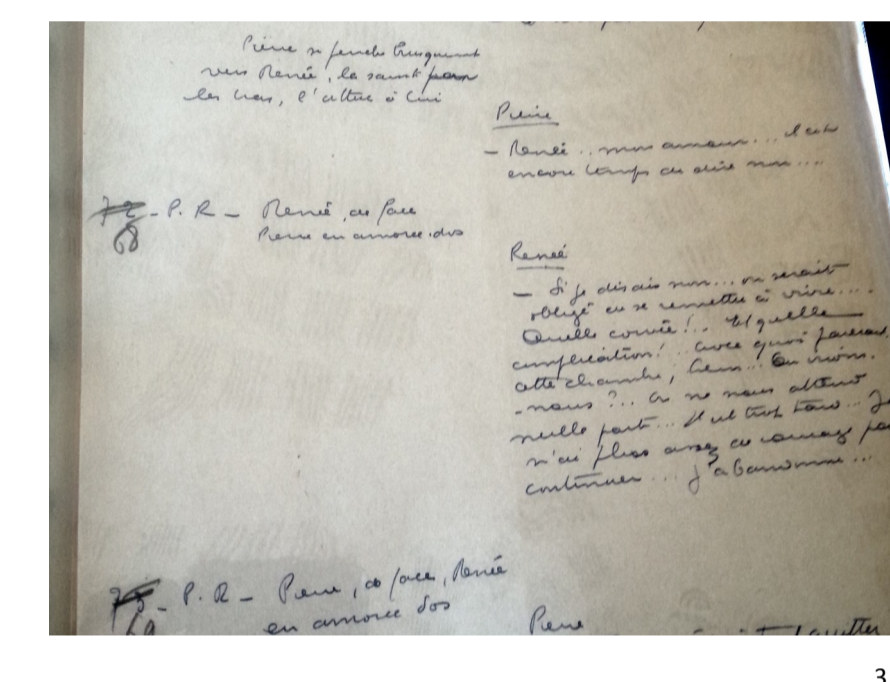
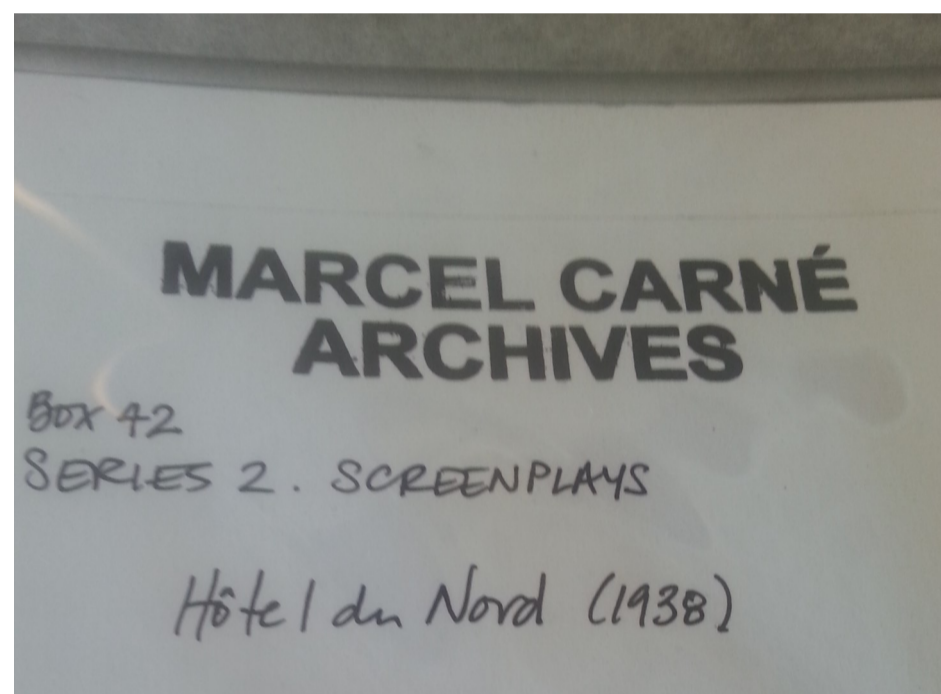
- ⇒ Moussé, C. 1999. Henri Jeanson. 1st ed. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy.
- ⇒ Perez, M. 1994. Films of Carné. 2nd ed. Paris: Ramsay.
- ⇒ Ganne, V. 2002. Leur dialogue préféré. Synopsis, 17, 4.
- ⇒ Delmas, L. 2001. Henri Jeanson ou le dialogue roi. Synopsis, 11, 3.

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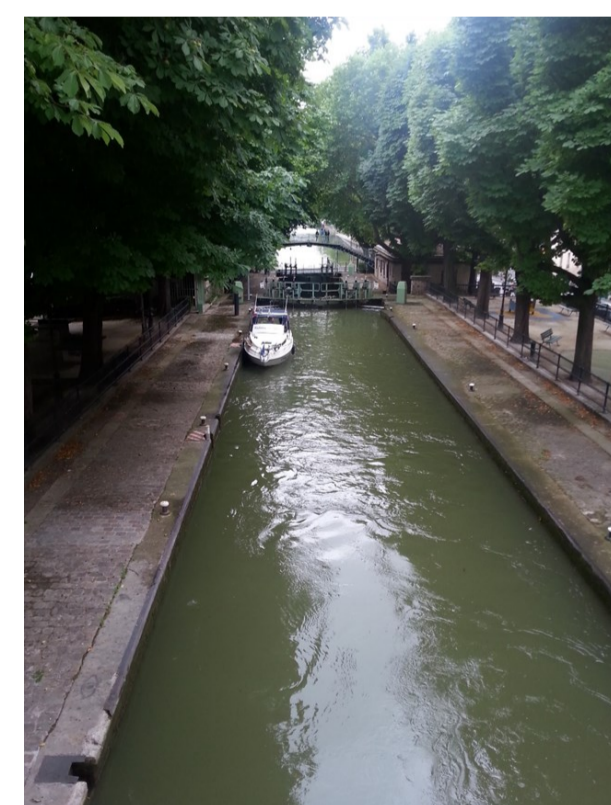
Archive Work

One of the most exciting aspects of my research was being able to look at archive materials stored at the Cinémathèque Française. There I was able to take pictures of original scripts complete with annotations by the director and save them to analyse back in Newcastle. The most valuable source of material I found was the handwritten *Hôtel du Nord* screenplay found in the Marcel Carné archive (below). It was fascinating to see the process of building up the script and the evolution of the dialogue in relation to screenplay. I feel this information was crucial in gaining an insight into how the director himself saw the word versus image debate; an excellent primary source for my research.



Key Skills

- ⇒ Being selective and focused on my question was crucial in finding conclusions during my research.
- ⇒ Keeping a detailed record of references, a skill I feel I would improve if I had the chance to carry out further research.
- ⇒ Being flexible and adapting my research aims as the project went along e.g. I found that there was much more in-depth material surrounding *Hôtel du Nord*. The influential image of the Canal St Martin and personality of Arletty led me to focus more heavily on this film and use information that I had found about *Lady Paname* and *Pépé le Moko* as supplementary research.



The Canal St Martin— an iconic image of working class Paris found in many films from *L'Atalante* to *Amélie*— was stunningly reconstructed by set designers for *Hôtel du Nord* and plays a vital role in shaping the film's Parisian identity. Set design and *mise en scène* played a key role in portraying a popular Paris to the audience, aside from the role of dialogue.



The importance of Hôtel du Nord

Hôtel du Nord, pictured now (left) and then (right) was the setting for Marcel Carné's 1938 film of the same name. Sources found in Paris emphasized the film's unforgettable *mise en scène*, most especially the atmospheric studio reconstruction of the hotel and the Canal St Martin in shaping in the minds of viewers a very distinguished image of Paris. However, as recalled by many critics and film fans alike, one piece of Jeanson's dialogue spoken in the film is now more famous than any image of Paris portrayed on screen - the now iconic line spoken by Arletty of "Atmosphère...est-ce que j'ai une gueule d'atmosphère?!"



RAYMONDE
C'est la première fois qu'on me
traite d'atmosphère... Si je
suis une atmosphère, t'es un
drôle de bled... Ah ! là, là...
Les hommes qui sont du milieu
sans en être et qui crânent
toujours à cause de ce qu'ils
ont été... on devrait les vider
... Si t'es pas content... t'as
qu'à y retourner dans ton passé
...

(left) Louis Jouvet and Arletty during the now infamous scene from Carné's 1938 classic *Hôtel du Nord*. (right) A photo taken from the archives of the Cinémathèque Française of the iconic piece of dialogue found in a signed copy of the film script sent to Arletty.

Conclusions

- ⇒ Dialogue provides the film with a regional identity that could never be transported to the viewer if the film were silent—slang words and accent is crucial in shaping the Parisian working class milieu of the film. However stars were in fact as important as image and dialogue—they were in themselves internationally recognised embodiments of the Parisian working class (Arletty's signature 'vulgarité racée' and 'voix d'oëille' ¹⁰)
- ⇒ This is proved by the fact that Jeanson often wrote his iconic lines with the star who was due to speak them in mind—would they have been as effective if spoken by a different actor?
- ⇒ Regardless of star persona, it is evident that dialogue has the power to speak to a nation or region but at the same time image is crucial in bringing to mind a certain feeling, even 'atmosphere' of a place and a time.