TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY RICHARD HOWARD / ANNETTE LIVERS

HILL AND WANG
A DIVISION OF FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
NEW YORK
as tainted: we have long since been snared in a fatal communion with this longshoreman who discovers a sense of social justice only to bestow it as a homage to American capital.

As we see, it is the participational nature of this scene which objectively makes it an episode of mystification. Trained to love Brando from the start, we can no longer at any point criticize him or even admit we are conscious of his objective stupidity. Now it is precisely against the danger of such mechanisms that Brecht proposed his method of alienation. Brecht would have asked Brando to show his naïveté, to make us understand that despite all the sympathy we may feel for his misfortunes, it is still more important that we see their causes and their remedies. We can sum up Kazan’s mistake by saying that what should have been judged was much less the capitalist than Brando himself. For there is much more to expect from the rebellion of victims than from the caricature of their executioners.

Greta Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when the apprehension of the human countenance plunged crowds into the greatest perturbation, where people literally lost themselves in the human image as if in a philter, when the face constituted a sort of absolute state of the flesh which one could neither attain nor abandon. Some years earlier, Valentino’s face caused suicides; Garbo’s still participates in that same realm of amour courois when the flesh develops certain mystical sentiments of perdition.

It is without a doubt an admirable face-as-object; in Queen Christina, a film shown again here in recent years, the star’s makeup has the snowy density of a mask; it is not a painted face but a face in plaster, protected by the surface of its shadows and not by its lineaments; in all this fragile and compact snow, only the eyes, black as some strange pulp but not at all expressive, are two rather tremulous wounds. Even in its extreme beauty, this face not drawn but instead sculptured in something smooth and friable, which is to say both perfect and ephemeral, matches somehow Chaplin’s flour-white complexion, those vegetally dark eyes, his totemic visage.

Now, the temptation of the total mask (the mask of antiquity, for example) may imply less the theme of secrecy (as is the case with the Italian half mask) than that of an archetype

See illustration 7.
of the human face. Garbo produced a sort of Platonic idea of
the human creature, which accounts for her own face being
virtually sexless without being at all "dubious." It's true that
the film (Queen Christina is alternately a woman and a young
cavalier) lends itself to this indeterminacy; but Garbo does not
give any kind of travestied performance; she is always herself,
frankly revealing under her crown or her wide-brimmed felt
hats the same countenance of snow and solitude. Her nick-
name, Divine, probably intended to suggest less a superlative
state of beauty than the essence of her corporeal person, de-
scended from a heaven where things are formed and finished
with the greatest clarity. She herself knew this: How many
actresses have consented to let the crowd watch the disturbing
maturation of their beauty? Not Garbo: the Essence must not
degradate, her visage could never have any other reality than
that of its intellectual perfection, even more than its plastic
one. The Essence has gradually dimmed, progressively veiled
by dark glasses, hooded capes, and various exiles; but it has
never altered.

Still, in that deified countenance, something sharper than
a mask appears: a sort of deliberate and therefore human rela-
tion between the curve of the nostrils and the superciliary ar-
cade, a rare, individual function between two zones of the
face; the mask is merely an addition of lines, the face is above
all a thematic recall of the former to the latter. Garbo's face
represents that fragile moment when cinema is about to ex-
tract an existential beauty from an essential beauty, when the
archetype will be inflected toward the fascination of perish-
able figures, when the clarity of carnal essences will give way
to a lyric expression of Woman.

As a moment of transition, Garbo's face reconciles two icon-
ographic ages, assures the passage from terror to charm. We
know that in our own moment we are at the other pole of this
evolution: Audrey Hepburn's face, for instance, is individualized
not only by its specific thematics (woman-as-child, woman-as-
cat), but also by her person, by a virtually unique specification
of the face, which has nothing essential left in it but is constitu-
ted by an infinite complexity of morphological functions.
As a language, Garbo's singularity was of a conceptual order,
Audrey Hepburn's of a substantial order. Garbo's face is an
Idea, Hepburn's an Event.