



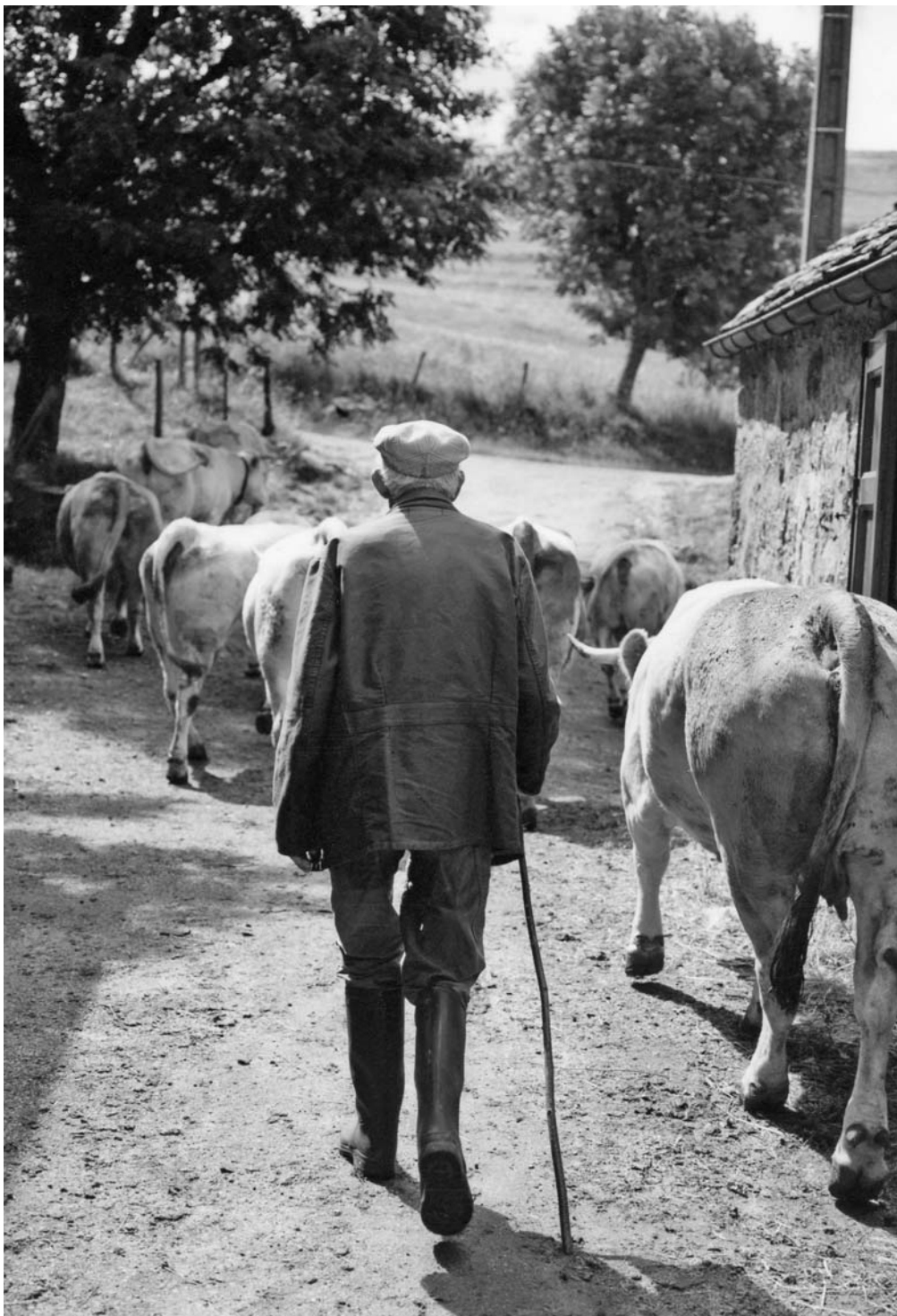
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD

MODERN LIFE

A film BY **Raymond DEPARDON**





Palmeraie et Désert
presents



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MODERN LIFE

A film BY **Raymond DEPARDON**

France / 90 min / Colour / Scope / 35mm / Dolby SRD

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Interview

with Raymond Depardon
and Claudine Nougaret

Synopsis

Through a series of portraits, Raymond Depardon becomes a witness to farmers' lives, values, and family stories: all that binds them to the land, and its legacy. He questions what will become of these "people of the land."

What was the initial idea for this long-term project?

Raymond Depardon: I spent my childhood on a farm and it took me a long time to come to terms with it, even though I left the farm very young, at the age of 16. Like a lot of people in the 1960's, I ran away from this world because I had a complex about it. Sometimes, I was even ashamed. Later I gradually starting feeling the opposite: I was proud to have been born on a farm. But I couldn't manage to make a film about it. I had to do a huge detour, a sort of world tour, before I dared film farmers. Yet I never filmed my own parents. In the late 1980's, I worked first for the magazine *Le Pèlerin* and then for the newspaper *Libération* on the disappearance of farmers. At that time, I was surprised to see that rural life, the life of my childhood, had not changed all that much. And I said to myself I had to keep working on it by filming it. So Claudine and I started making "Profils Paysans" in 1998.

Claudine Nougaret: At first, we wanted to make only one film over a ten-year period but it did not fit at all with cinematographic or audiovisual production criteria.

You chose to focus on farmers from the highlands. Why?

RD. Agriculture has changed. It has become industrial. I've even heard: "Our small-scale agriculture is dead." But having done these photo reports on highland farmers, I realized it was not true. Except you weren't supposed to talk about it. It was "bad for France," I was told. Yet these are the people who are the most interesting. There is an issue that was at the heart of the story of my parents' farm: who hands it on and who takes it over? What happens to these small or medium-sized farms? Are they taken over by members of the families who have mostly been settled there for a very long time, or by young people who prefer the countryside to the city? Do they all become second homes, which is unfortunately the trend? That was the driving force behind our project at the outset. "*L'Approche*" (The Approach) and "*Le Quotidien*" (Everyday life) led us to "*La vie moderne*" (Modern Life). It took us ten years to make the film we dreamed of making. Even if the farmers know exactly who we are, we had to establish a relationship of trust. As far as I know, it's the first time a film has been made

about this, in this way, over a long period.

How did you go about finding these farms and choosing these farmers? And how did you get them to trust you?

CN. Raymond's approach was the fruit of years of location scouting for photographs. I did not get involved in his wish to film one farm rather than another. To the point where, for many years, until recently, I was incapable of saying where we had filmed. The relationship was between Raymond and the farmers. It was important for me that he felt a photographic empathy with the people and places.

RD. We had a very specific method: we tried as best we could to be "adopted," meaning we didn't force anyone. But at a given moment, we have to start shooting. If we spend a week just watching and suddenly, I take out the camera, people are a little uncomfortable. And so are we. You can think the more time you spend with people without filming them, the better you get to know them and the easier it will be when you start filming. It's not true. You can't play up a fake relationship with

them. We respect them too much. And to respect them, you need a little silence and a little distance because they live in incredible solitude and you can't bother them. Paradoxically, they are both very suspicious and very open. How do you film them without bothering them? I think it's due to the energy we both give off. After a while, they ask us to come back.

What was your set-up in terms of sound and image?

CN. At first, we lay in ambush. We had no idea how we would be received. We would approach the farms and we had every reason to be humble. But it is also thanks to this experience with *The Approach* and *Daily Life* that we could devote more technical means to *Modern Life* even though there were still only two of us on the shoot.

RD. You can't possibly interrupt a dealer who is negotiating the sale of a heifer with a farmer. You can't say to them, "Stop! Let's shoot it again." It's impossible. We soon saw that we could give ourselves better means not only to make the film more spectacular but also to avoid always associating farmers with miserabilism and poverty, notions I've always wanted to keep away from, including in films such as "*Délits flagrants*" (*Caught in the Acts*). Thanks to Jean-Pierre Beauviala, who makes Aaton

cameras, I was able to use, for the first time in France, a prototype with 2 perforations. Australian greenie-filmmakers realized you could shoot in 35mm in a more economical way. Until now, you had to have four perforations to make an image. They realized it was probably possible with two perforations but they would have to shoot in panoramic, which allowed them to use 8'40 reels instead of 4'20. This length interested me so I could film situations live where I talk to people or they talk among themselves.

Why did you favor long shots?

CN. To let people express themselves and so we can hear them, you have to take your time. We do not make knockout documentaries. We are as interested in the slow moments as in the action. There is a lot of information carried by sound and image that is not spoken. These long shots are also there to give the audience some "reading time." We did not want to manipulate that time to allow viewers to discover plenty of things themselves: a clock on the wall, a waxed tablecloth or a coffee maker in the corner of the kitchen... Likewise, to avoid sliding into postcard lyricism, I didn't let myself record certain sounds, such as a rooster crowing or a pigeon cooing.

RD. I shoot relatively little footage to show everything. There is no reason to do continuity shots to

make our presence felt. You shoot or you don't, in any case, for them, it's all the same. They don't do anything for the camera. But we were always careful to protect them. I don't want to turn farmers into actors. We listen to them. They listen to us and we have a conversation. Giving them a say, creating a dialogue at the corner of a table is not folklore. It is giving concrete expression to human relations. This does not come particularly from my childhood, but rather from the deliberate wish of the filmmaker to free up listening.

Were you ever not allowed to shoot certain scenes?

RD. Never. Sometimes, there were scenes we didn't want to show but again, we were not there to bother them.

CN. We always chose not to harm the people we filmed.

RD. By filming these farmers over a ten-year period, you could imagine that after a while, they would be less spontaneous, hamming it up in front of the camera. Not at all! These people stay the way they are. They can be silent or talkative, sad or happy, whatever. But they were never taken by surprise and they never tried to please us. It's fantastic. Above all, they said what they had to say, so there is a relationship between the person

filming and the person who is filmed that I rarely got in my other documentaries.

Who chose the title *Modern Life*?

RD. It was Claudine. She didn't want the film to be nostalgic or negative. For the first time, in *Modern Life* we get a sense of hope. We are very happy to have filmed a farmer who built his farm in the Cévennes Park.

CN. It is a title that says a lot about relationships between people. There is no longer the traditional side that we felt before. *Modern Life* is above all about life today.

RD. In many ways, especially ecologically, they are ahead of city dwellers. They are saving the planet but we don't know about it because nobody is interested in them anymore... And they will probably hold up longer than us. This film is definitely turned toward the future. There is a scene I'm very proud of, in which we see a little boy say he wants to do the same job as his dad. He doesn't want to go to the city...

What did you not know about farming life that you found out during these ten years spent filming them?

CN. I didn't think rural life could be so precarious, even though the situation has improved somewhat in the last ten years. I didn't know it could be so difficult economically, that it could be so lonely.

RD. I think, in the end, they're a lot like us. These people, who are now a minority, are very contemporary. More than I thought. That is why *Modern Life* is a film rooted in the present. It is not nostalgic, even if it is the memory of the farm in Garet that gave me the energy to make it. It is not a "disappearing world," or a "separate world," it is a world that is not unlike our own. They don't expect anything from anyone anymore. They know they can only count on themselves. Like us.

What did this documentary bring you compared to other documentaries you have made in much shorter periods?

CN. It is an experience that obliged us to become financially autonomous in the way we make films. We have become masters of our creative tool and means of production. In a way, we can say we have turned ourselves into farmers in the film industry. This work obliged us to make lifestyle choices.

RD. The words that end *Modern Life* are "at peace." Making a film about where you come from is not easy. I was sometimes ashamed of filming these farmers because I felt like I'd betrayed them even if they don't blame me for anything at all. I won't say the problem is resolved but yes, I'm at peace. And this journey is very visible in *Modern Life*. There is a sort of calm, with no concessions

and no exaggeration. We are with them and we have never been so close to them. We go back and see them to keep up the incredible relationship that has formed between us.

Biography

Raymond Depardon

Born in 1942 to a family of farmers, at the age of 12 he started taking photographs of the family farm.

After being an all-round reporter at the agency Dalmas in Paris, in 1966 he co-founded the agency Gamma and started reporting all around the world.

Alongside his work as a photographer, he began shooting documentaries.

In 1978 he joined the agency Magnum and continued investigative journalism until 1981. He received the Grand Prix National de la Photographie in 1991 and the César for best documentary for "Délits flagrants" (Caught in the Acts) in 1995.

In 2003, he was given special permission to film hearings at the Paris District Court. "10e chambre, instants d'audiences" (The 10th District Court, Moments of Trial) was presented in official selection at Cannes in 2004.

In 2006, he was invited to be artistic director of the 37th Rencontres Internationales de la photographie d'Arles.

In 2008, in parallel to the cinema release of the film "La vie moderne" (Modern Life), éditions du seuil published "Raymond Depardon 1968" and "La terre des paysans,"

and together with Paul Virilio, in November he will present an installation titled "Terre Natale" at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art in Paris.

He has released eighteen feature films and published forty-seven books.

Filmography

2008	La vie moderne (<i>Modern Life</i>)
2005	Profils paysans : le quotidien
2004	10 ^e chambre, instants d'audiences (<i>The 10th District Court, Moments of Trial</i>)
2003	Un homme sans l'occident (<i>Untouched by the West</i>)
2002	1974, une partie de campagne
2000	Profils paysans : l'approche
1999	Muriel Leferle
1998	Paris
1996	Afriques : comment ça va avec la douleur ? (<i>Africa, How Are You With Pain ?</i>)
1994	Délits flagrants (<i>Caught in the Acts</i>)
1990	La captive du désert (<i>Prisoner of the Desert</i>)
1988	Urgences
1985	Empty quarter, une femme en Afrique (<i>Empty Quarter, a Woman in Africa</i>)
1984	Les années déclin (<i>The Decline Years</i>)
1983	Faits divers (<i>News Items</i>)
1981	Reporters
1980	San Clemente
1977	Numéros zéro

Claudine Nougaret

After graduating from high school in literature as an independent student and studying musicology, she signed up for night classes at the Louis-Lumière School in Paris in the sound department.

After working for ten years as a sound engineer on many feature films, in 1992, she and Raymond Depardon founded the production company Palmeraie et Désert and produced "Afriques : comment ça va avec la douleur ?" (Africa, How Are You With Pain?)

In 1997, she and Sophie Chiabaut published "Le son direct au cinéma" edited by the FEMIS, a book of interviews with sound engineers that defined the trade.

She added all Raymond Depardon's films to Palmeraie et Désert's catalogue in 2001 and began editing them on DVD before becoming the producer in 2002 of "1974, une partie de campagne," "Un homme sans l'occident" (A Man Untouched by the West) (official selection for the Venice Film Festival) and "10e chambre, instants d'audiences" (The 10th District Court, Moments of Trial) (official selection, not in competition, Cannes Festival) for which she also did the sound.

After handling the cinema release of "Profils paysans : le quotidien" (2005), in 2006, she began producing "La vie moderne" (Modern Life).

In 2007, Claudine Nougaret launched the production of twelve 5-minute films (Villes/ Cities/ Städte) for the Cartier Foundation and the short film "Cinéma d'été" presented for the 60th anniversary of the Cannes Film Festival.

MODERN LIFE

(La Vie Moderne)

A film by **RAYMOND DEPARDON**

Production and sound	Claudine Nougaret
Soundtrack	Gabriel Fauré
Editing	Simon Jacquet
Mixing	Gérard Lamps

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