Zola’s work, in developing those plans which scholars have called *dossiers préparatoires*, frequently presents amazing similarities with what is generally called a film script, or screenplay, aiming to provide guidelines for a classical narrative film, which fundamentally means a series of texts that pave the way for the filming work. It is with such a text, or pre-text, as a point of departure that later the film script proper is elaborated, with the more or less direct collaboration of the whole film crew. The demonstration of this fact has, in our opinion, direct consequences for two sets of problems concerning, above all, the discipline of comparative literature. The first leads to in-depth knowledge of that intermediary text, the script itself, which is a compromise between the verbal and another type or substance of expression. The second leads us, by developing the comparison, to deepen the mutual illumination between literature and cinema, through which one may question whether or not the discourse of film and the language of cinema are consequences of the filming technique, that is, of its optical and mechanical engineering, and whether the script is a necessity in the process of chain production. This latter consequence can have determining effects in the debate relating above all to the “origins of cinema,” given that it is our intention here to demonstrate that something very similar to a script already existed in literature in the production of an individual narrative practice. Such a practice could therefore not be directly attributed to the demands of the industrial or semi-industrial production of cinema.

The development of a perspective of this kind immediately requires of a preliminary question: what is a script? Or rather, what do we understand a script to be, as a point of departure, given that one of the points of arrival, or at least a passing point in our heuristic path, is—as previously mentioned—an in-depth study of that very text? Whatever the question, however, it is not easy to answer because the problem is complex at various levels. The script, the written text which provides guidelines for filming, can be written by someone who knows or does not know filming technique (studio, machines, editing, lighting, sound effects, actors) to varying degrees, from knowing little or nothing to
knowing a lot; it can be written—at least partly—by someone who knows how to tell a story or someone who does not. And this type of alternative could go on and on. In practice, the model which has imposed itself so far, thanks to its wisdom, derives from two combined efforts: a well-presented narrative, with the principal situations and the action well conceived, with the settings or the milieu clearly stated; and a verbal enunciation with very precise instructions about the visualization or perceptions. As Pudovkin would say to aspiring scriptwriters—or screenplay writers, as he used to call this new brand of associates1—this is what happens when the story line is well conceived and in agreement with its general basis: it is novelistic, dramatic, tragic, but in any case free of any verbosity of little interest and even detrimental to the progress of film production work.

We can thus take as relatively close and almost equivalent two concepts which refer to intermediate text: the script, or shooting script, which is guided primarily by the demands of the principle that film work is an industrial process, therefore tending to include minimum signs of literary intervention and much more technical and stage annotation—whose degree can vary greatly, but, if followed by the director, will end up being a verbal plan which entirely reproduces the film. The story, which can contain many more marks of a poetical-literary nature, can also limit itself, quite often, to the general suggestion of points of view, action, characterization of characters and settings, and narration, which the film director must transform into precise instructions for poetical-filmic and technical-cinematographic procedures. A story can even be devised by a person with a reasonable knowledge of cinema, and it can indicate, for example, that it is necessary to present a crowd, or an assembly, or a meeting, in two different positions in long shots; however, it is up to the director, with intervention from the scriptwriter and the director of photography, to decide if those shots are horizontal or crane shots, if they should be double, with simple cut or raccord, or whether s/he would rather use a camera in motion. And all of this, in principle, will be part of the shooting script proper.

Given that it is our intention to evaluate Zola’s dossiers préparatoires as models foreshadowing the demand for certain narrative

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1 My translation from the Portuguese. See Vsevolod Pudovkin, Argumento e realização (Lisboa: Arcádia, 1961). At this stage in our argument, we maintain the difference between screenplay and (shooting) script, such as presented above, and the Soviet film director seems to us one of the people in whose work we could pinpoint the concept of screenplay as a “literary” or less cinematographic phase of the pre-film text.
enunciating postures which characterize the poetics of classical narrative cinema, it will be most relevant to compare the principles of naturalism which led to Zola’s dossiers with general models for scripts or preparatory texts. However, we shall not do it by taking the writer as point of departure. Rather, we shall roughly use the normative principle, as it applies in industrial production, in order to better understand the cultural scope of Zola’s free creative posture.

It is perhaps not irrelevant to begin by reading Pudovkin’s words, written, because they bring the weight of the entire tradition and influence of the literary model of the realist and naturalist novel to bear upon the major guidelines of cinematographic work itself. Moreover, in the 1920s and 30s, Pudovkin is one of the most important theoreticians for the consolidation of a certain “ideal” type of screenplay in classical narrative cinema. In Argumento e realização, he declares:

It is very important to understand that even in the general preparatory work for a screenplay one must avoid indicating anything whatsoever which cannot be represented cinematographically or which is not essential. The text must include only that which can be used as expressive and effective plastic material […] In the screenplay in question what should have been described is a scene expressing, in visible and visibly expressive terms, “the most abject misery” […]. One can object that this work belongs to the next phase and can, in fact, be attributed to the film director, but to that I should reply again by emphasizing that it is plastic material that must always be present, from the very first moment, in the author’s visual imagination.

To be able to appreciate fully the theoretical position which underpins the working procedure leading—more than inspiring—Zola in the construction of his novels, it is advisable to juxtapose these recommendations by Pudovkin concerning the preparatory work for a screenplay with Zola’s

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2 Given some general prejudices as to production processes in Soviet society that have never been completely dispelled, it may seem paradoxical that we should present a Soviet film director as the theoretician of the model of industrial production—normally considered “capitalist.” But this is not the case, nor is it a mistake to cite him here. The American model of industrial production followed by the masters of classical narrative cinema is not only known, but often taken as an example by Pudovkin, when he wishes to explain how to elaborate a screenplay.

3 My translation from the Portuguese. See Pudovkin 56-57.
own characterization of “Un de nos romanciers naturalistes”—which, as far as we know, describes Zola himself, above all, as he constructs it:

Un de nos romanciers naturalistes veut écrire un roman […] Il part de cette idée générale, sans avoir encore un fait ni un personnage. Son premier soin sera de rassembler dans des notes tout ce qu’il peut savoir sur ce monde qu’il veut peindre. […] Puis il se mettra en campagne, il fera causer les hommes les mieux renseignés sur la matière, il collectionnera les mots, les histoires, les portraits. […] il ira ensuite aux documents écrits […]. Enfin, il visitera les lieux […] pour en connaître les moindres recoins […]. Et, une fois les documents complétés, son roman, comme je l’ai dit, s’établira de lui-même. […] Aujourd’hui, la qualité maîtresse du romancier est le sens du réel. […] Le sens du réel, c’est de sentir la nature et de la rendre telle qu’elle est.5

Let us make it clear from the start that it is not our intention to drag this question into the deep waters of a debate on reality, realism, or reality in naturalism. Nevertheless, we will have to accept that one of the great groundings for the extensive and intensive influence of the nineteenth-century novel on the first film directors—and in particular Zola’s on the Soviets, as evidenced in many of Eisenstein’s enthusiastic comments, for example—has to do with an identification between the model for photographic representation, the faithfulness of the camera obscura, and the naturalists’ techniques for fictional representation, which were based not only but largely on developing a documentation for the senses, especially of a visual kind. In the end, the same assumption is valid for both systems: Zola’s naturalism and classical narrative cinema. This is the assumption—tacitly granted as a principle, at the current stage in our culture, and through which our culture expands—that, as Metz argues, the majority of images, taken in their general aspect, “resemble” that which they represent6 even though we know that, at a further point along this path, the very codification of the visible will come into question, because “to resemble” and “to represent” are not at all evident concepts.

The depth of the questions on which we will partially focus here comes after that prerequisite, though it does not mean a capitulation to semiotic reflection, but rather a challenge. This was already the case for

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4 We treat the “preparatory” text as poetical, and hence in principle “non-translatable.”
the poetics we are considering here, and as such we have to agree with Sánchez Noriega, when he reminds us—concerning the confrontation of film image and fictional word—that “the image-shot is concrete, but not univocal, given that mere representativeness does not immediately presuppose a meaning.” The *Dossier préparatoire* for *La Bête humaine* contains an amazing example of this very visual, not univocal, quality of the image-shot, not only as far as the observed subject matter is concerned, but also as to the device of point of view. We can best appreciate it when we compare two moments in the development of Zola’s outline, that is, in two successive outlines.

In a relatively detailed first plan, Zola presents “Étienne seul sur la route de Marchiennes à Montsou. […] Il en est parti de bonne heure, pour se rendre à Douai, ou ailleurs. Il n’y a pas trouvé de travail, dans les grandes usines.” In a second plan, which improves or updates the previous one as to detail and concern with the plastic perception of the world, we see this change: “Dans la plaine rase, sous la nuit de mars, poser un homme qui marche. Il ne voit rien, il n’a conscience que de l’étendue par le vent qui souffle (le vent balayant) et vient de loin. La route noire (toute droite) à ses pieds, il ne la voit pas. Temps sec, aigre, ciel épais d’encre […] le vent coupe, son petit paquet sous le bras, les mains dans les poches, vêtu légèrement, petit palétot.”

Thus, in the latter plan, we notice the evocation of a perceptible universe, visual and tactile—and the alternate replacement of one sense with another is not univocal, the walking at night, in inclement weather, raises questions—in which no image is a mere representation devoid of ambiguity. On the other hand, looking at two successive preparatory texts, it is curious to note that, in the construction of levels towards the final phase of his mimesis, Zola took care to develop a kind of progress towards erasing the “knowledge” of the enunciating subject, and even the possibility of identifying that subject, by using the infinitive in his phrasing. In his first draft, he knows the character’s name, he knows that he is unemployed, and he knows where he is going; that knowledge ensures the existence of an enunciating subject, a human authorial narrator, with explicit social-economic codes. In his second draft he ignores everything having to do with those codes; rather, he resembles a mechanism capable of registering physical signs. Everything that arises

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7 My translation from the Spanish. See José Luis Sánchez Noriega, *De la literatura al cine* (Barcelona: Piados, 2000) 39.

as a dramatic or narrative suggestion in the second draft seems barely to be announced in signs: the weather, the cold, the small package, the light clothing in a long walk through an empty field. The very identification of the enunciating subject is jeopardized: who is going to “poser un homme qui marche”? What is most amazing is that this draft seems to have been composed by someone who knew about the functioning of film production, whereas, as we know, from a strictly technical point of view, that is not possible in Zola’s case. Although cinema had already made its appearance, a little before Zola’s death, the films that had been made until then were little more than short documentaries or minute-long fantasies.9 It is as if the first draft corresponded to a summarized script (or “outline,” in the American industrial production model) and as if the second one came closer to a shooting script. Or rather, if we are to respect the paradoxical statement upholding Chion’s vehemence against technical intransigence, “the way in which the script is presented has nothing to do with its dramatic structure,”10 it looks as if the French novelist’s drafts were destined for different stages in poetical elaboration. If, as Chion claims, each type is nothing but a stage, “according to the function that it should perform” and the user it is intended for, including the film director,11 we would be justified in thinking that Zola the subject, drafting the various stages of his plans, does so not as an inspired “I” who constructs his novel or work in a single breath, but parcels out the task. For this purpose he designed the task in phases, from the general plan—which falls to the entity responsible for the ideological-imaginative dimension, to the fictional screenplay—which is the responsibility of the entity specializing in rhetorical and poetical procedures, to the intervention of the authorial narrator, the ultimate enunciating authority, who coordinates all efforts, a position very similar to that of the film director in cinema.

In order to get safely closer to the hypothesis we are putting forward here, at least in general outline, as the best one to explain Zola’s work, it is necessary to know which major types of pre-text are recognised—with some general agreement but without any kind of ruling to this effect—by film directors and the writers who work with them, in the preparatory work for shooting a film.

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9 With a measure of surprise, and without claiming to be definitely rigorous and precise, we acknowledge that the first known script is by Méliès: Voyage à travers l’impossible (1904).

10 My translation from the Spanish. See Michel Chion, Como se escribe un guión (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001) 205.

11 My translation. See Chion 205.
In this we are aided by concise presentations of the subject made by Francis Vanoye\textsuperscript{12} and Michel Chion\textsuperscript{13} who turns either to a survey of the handbooks published in countries where the industry is more developed\textsuperscript{14} or to practices customary in countries such as France and the United States.\textsuperscript{15} According to both authors, there are five types of pre-texts, which can be categorized as follows, from the more general and less long, from thematic summaries of major topics, to the lengthiest and most detailed: a) \textit{synopsis (brief outline)}—from the Greek, meaning “which can be seen at one single glance,” that is, a brief summary of plot, characters, and intentions—including arousing the interest of a producer and, later, that of the audience; b) \textit{story/theme (outline)}—a concept which refers to a work not in its final form, which is being developed, but which often appears indicated as in the final stages of elaboration, given that it refers to the authorship of the storyline and the major developments in the plot. Sometimes it is even one of the common ways to refer to what should technically be called “treatment;”\textsuperscript{16} c) \textit{treatment}—that is to say, the elaboration of the story in a few pages (fifteen to forty, as some handbooks tell us), articulating the plot, its progression, its dramatic structure, and a sketch of the dialogues presented continuously, though it sometimes includes one or two dialogues, generally in indirect speech; d) \textit{dialogue continuity}, as Vanoye tells us concisely, “offers a breakdown of the story into scenes and sequences, a description of the actions, and the complete text of the dialogues\textsuperscript{17}; according to Chion, in France this is already considered a film script (\textit{scénario}, in French)\textsuperscript{18}: likewise, it is also true that, even in the United States, major film directors work with a model very similar to this; e) finally, \textit{the shooting script (découpage technique, in French)} is a step, or rather, considering the hesitation in naming it, a series of final steps leading from the more developed narrative/descriptive/dramatic elaborations of the previous stage to what we can describe as an almost complete expression of a written text of the finished film.

\textsuperscript{12} See Francis Vanoye, \textit{Guiones modelo e modelos de guión} (Barcelona: Piados, 1996) 14-19.
\textsuperscript{13} See Chion 205-10.
\textsuperscript{14} See Vanoye 14 and Chion 205.
\textsuperscript{15} See Chion 205.
\textsuperscript{16} Notwithstanding this, many experienced authors hand in work that they call a \textit{screen-play} although it is more precisely a \textit{dialogue continuity}. Steinbeck’s \textit{Viva Zapata} is a good example.
\textsuperscript{17} Vanoye 14.
\textsuperscript{18} Chion 208.
As Vanoye reminds us, in the “dialectic inversion pertaining to all relations between model and object [...] the film too becomes a model for [...] scripts,” so that in analyzing films one works “not so much with film scripts as with models for scripts, which the finished films and their transcriptions provide.”

According to the texts by Zola that we have quoted so far, we can glimpse in the French writer types of texts similar to those that the industry has by now established and instituted in the (almost one-century old) praxis of regulation by handbooks and standardization, by tacit agreements in the work practice. Any provisional approximations between the models and the stages of script preparation and development could be called, for instance, the “general idea,” a moment which Zola considers previous to research, a “general idea” that will next be followed by “fact and character,” which he will discover in the field. In very general terms, this is what we find as an embryo of the fabula or plot in the excerpt of the first plan for Germinal, where character and fact (unemployment) are established. Only later, in further developed drafts, does Zola provide further elements for the spatial setting and the dramatic process.

In the Dossier préparatoire for La Faute de l’abbé Mouret, Mitterand considers the original genetic element closely follows the same procedure. The point of departure is that of a general theme, a set of problems, where the character is still only barely recognizable. According to Mitterand, “[l]es premières lignes de L’Ébauche définissent le thème et la structure de l’œuvre: ‘l’histoire d’un homme frappé dans sa virilité par une éducation première, devenu être neutre, se réveillant homme à vingt-cinq ans, dans les sollicitations de la nature, mais retombant fatalement à l’impuissance.’ Trois parties: le sacerdoce dans un village du Midi; la ‘longue idylle’ dans le grand parc, où ‘la nature joue le rôle du Satan de la Bible’; le retour à la prêtrise, et le drame.” Curiously, as Mitterand begins to comment on Zola’s text, he calls it a “scénario,” outlined in three parts.

Leaving aside the inevitable differences, we can observe that already at this threshold Zola’s sketches bring forth, in general features at least, and with some precision, the textual types which in cinema later came to be called synopsis and/or theme or outline. Nevertheless,

19 Vanoye 21.
we must forget the reality of the facts with which we are dealing. As to textual development, while building the novel’s structure out of these preparatory phases, that development seems to correspond to an aesthetic-ideological concern strongly put forward by realism, but above all, by naturalism, as Zola understood it. When that concern is at play, we are no longer dealing merely with the development of a story, by means of the weaving and thickening of a more or less cleverly schemed plot. In the end, we perceive that Zola’s literary craft develops according to “a rational and scientific method,” following an order that he himself considers advisable, after the choice of theme, the collecting of material, the drafting of a sketch (that is, in Colette Becker’s words, “la ligne générale du roman”), “fiches sur les personnages, plan par chapitre, relecture d’ensemble avec répartition de la documentation sous forme d’ajouts à la fin de chaque plan, et, une fois cette charpente solidement mise en place, un deuxième plan détaillé par chapitre suivi de la rédaction immédiate.”

However, it is true that Zola’s sketches do not always correspond to this embryonic formulation, upon which later textual layers are laid; we might call this plan one and plan two, for convenience, turning it into an entity which already foreshadows, as if miraculously, the work of screenplay writing in cinema. In fact, a sketch by Zola is sometimes developed enough to present the essential lines of action and dramatic tension, while he is presenting the protagonists and the remaining characters of the novel. That is the case, for example, with l’Ébauche, which Mitterand presents, in the preparatory dossier for Une page d’amour.

On the other hand, what seems most interesting to us in these textual operations undertaken by Zola, registered with admiration as they are by almost all scholars studying his work, is the novelty they introduce in the author’s (and even the school’s) poetics. In fact, when Zola defines his writing as being that of a naturalist novelist, thus rendering evident his work processes as well as the goals he pursues, he emphasizes in a very enlightening manner the innovative and dynamic way in which he imposes the procedures of rhetoric on the novelistic discourse, that is to say, he puts into practice (in narrative) the realms of inventio, dispositio and elocutio. Without elaborating here on a topic which would deserve ample treatment of itself alone, we find it nonetheless appropri-

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ate to underline the aspect of modernity that Zola’s poetic practice carries with it. This becomes evident in the way in which he discusses from the very first sketches the general lines of the plot and its casuistry, while at the same time analyzing the action and its insertion in the spaces he creates scene by scene, each time in greater detail, first in a plan (screenplay) and often again in a detailed second one, as he does for example for *Germinal*.

Naturally, this level of narrative preparation indicates that the preparatory dossier followed a practice which, at the time, was ruled according to the “two first parts" of rhetoric, *inventio* and *dispositio*, as mentioned above, which “affect the planning of discourse and its organisation at the level of content.”\(^{23}\) The preparatory phase being that of *planning, its product* is not a *text*: it is a *pre-text*, that is to say, a text that will not be read because it is *going to turn into another one*, or that will be read as announcing another one. It is also the abstracted text, the summary text, the web text, or plot. According to other perspectives, it is the *fabula* text, or the *story* text. On the level of iconic representation, it is the text indicative of the perspective to be developed according to the point of view of a character to be conceived. It is also the text that allows for stage directions (*didaskalia*), which refer to a different sort of language, but also to the metalanguage which theorizes about them, a vocabulary for the study of narrative. Somehow the presence of these models in Zola also already announces cinematic texts. Indirectly, this sort of work by Zola carries out the hypothetic cleavage between narrative and the word, announcing the possibility of stories one day not necessarily having to be enunciated by a verbal fictional discourse.

Now that these questions have been formulated, it is time to insist once again on the question of research, observation, and experiential research undertaken by the novelist in the phase that we might call the gathering of *storylines*. Allowing the suggestion implied in *inventio*, let us keep in mind that for Zola the most important thing is “le sens du réel” and the fact that “tout le monde a deux yeux pour voir” and can therefore “sentir la nature et la rendre telle qu’elle est.”\(^{25}\) This question, then, does not arise merely in the construction of the novel;

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\(^{23}\) In order to keep the text as short as possible, we cite Reboul: “On entend par ‘parties’ les phases par où passe nécessairement la genèse du discours” (Olivier Reboul, *La Rhétorique* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, “Que sais-je,” no 2133, 1990] 20).


it starts building up in the very plans. Various scholars have drawn our attention to processes of using description and point of view: in *Germinal*, a certain view of the mine, or of a worker’s cottage, which the novelist inspected and recorded minutely in his notes, is later placed under the scrutiny of one character or another; the church where Mouret officiates, described and drawn in great detail by the novelist in the preparatory dossier, constitutes the opening description of *La Faute*, done in close-ups of deteriorating objects seen from the perspective of a house keeper.

Indeed, it is when Philippe Hamon comments on the question of this visual scrutiny that he leads us to the crux of our analysis. Reveals a close relation between Zola’s poetic ideology and the poetics which led to the development of models in classical narrative cinema (in this category we include as great masters Hollywood film directors ranging from Griffiths, in the beginnings, to Eastwood, today), as well as to their authorial poetics, ideologically connected with the great commercial interests of the studios. Ascertaining that “the theme of the gaze” is all pervasive in *La Bête humaine*, Hamon observes that one of the functions of the gaze may be merely utilitarian: “Son regard n’est mentionné que pour introduire la fiche descriptive et informative en attente, pour exposition initiale du cadre où va se passer le roman, dans les notes du “Dossier préparatoire.”

In fact, Zola prepared the general written plan in order to make a drawing:

Plan de la gare, en attendant que j’aie un croquis: près de la rue d’Amsterdam, la grande ligne; puis un bâtiment central où se trouvent la poste et la bouillotterie; au-delà, la voie d’Argenteuil, de Sannois, dans un autre hall; une partie couverte pour Saint-Germain et Versailles; et enfin Auteuil et la ceinture, dans un petit hall mal couvert. Donc, dans les garages, dans les docks, comme ils les nommaient, les machines de manœuvre formaient et amenaient les trains.

What we can see in this short quotation is that the indicative traits only present a perspective, a point of view, independently of who or what will come to stand as the object of the gaze. Thus, freeing the mechanism

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26 We are referring here to the cinematographic shot, to what some consider to be the minimum unit in cinema (though this is always a controversial question).


of enunciation from the need for a subjectivity that will authenticate it, this operation (which developed as common practice in texts and plans) inevitably heralds a new aesthetic and poetic horizon: that in which narrative can be articulated by means other than the voice, other than an animating subjectivity in the shape of a living word. We are not claiming that Zola analyzed it theoretically—but he did practice it, and he made it evident that the possibility of such a practice could exist in literature. This was actually already being done in the “moving images” which, during the last years of his life, enthralled audiences with fabulous folk narratives by almost anonymous narrators. There is no doubt that: “Roubaud, accoudé à sa fenêtre, n’est là que le truchement et le délégué de Zola, le porte-regard destiné à endosser et à rendre vraisemblable, dans l’absence de l’auteur naturaliste qui ne doit en aucun cas apparaître sur la scène du texte, cette description.”

On the other hand, however, this leads to a central question regarding the overlap between Zola and classical cinema in their preferred mode of internal focalization; that is, focalization borne by a character. As Sánchez Noriega explains, “film text appears to have the vocation […] to establish internal focalization, given the fact that the character is always diegetically present […] because the spectator’s knowledge corresponds exactly to that of the character, in the total absence of any intermediary narrator.”

Another impressive aspect concerning ocular objectification in Zola’s notes, which often makes them appear intentionally designed as film “shootings,” is the fact that he writes some notes assuming various positions in relation to the same object, or observing the same object at various moments during the day (with varying light and shade). Extremely innovative configurations of planning (even revolutionary ones, indeed, as far as the photography technique of the day is concerned, Zola having been an enthusiast of photography) thus appear, as well as suggestions of depth of field in certain details, which later would be reformulated in cinema, with regards to narrative problems.

In the wealth of “preparatory” material available to us, it is in Zola’s notes about “Les Halles,” for Le Ventre de Paris, that the procedures for paracinematographic perspective become most apparent:

Vers 4 heures. Les persiennes en haut sont baissées. La Halle est toute grise. Les verrières allongées des rues jettent seules des rais de soleil, dans le gris général. Les pavillons vus de la poissonnerie, à l’heure où

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29 Philippe Hamon, La Bête humaine d’Émile Zola, 59.
30 My translation from the Spanish. See José Luis Sánchez Noriega 94.

Obviously one can always argue, in relation to the various examples presented here, that Zola’s aesthetics depended on the manner in which a relationship was established between literature and painting. We cannot but be in agreement. And we can even add that the paradigm of perspectives in question would be incomplete unless we include the rising influence of photography and—without wishing to push the point too far—the weight of naturalist conceptions about the theatre. In our opinion, it is the whole of all these paradigmatic relations that require the formulation of a new paradigm in line with the general model of literary narrative that guides Zola towards the striking similarities with cinematographic screenplays that we have been underlining here. In order to understand this question more fully, it would be of importance

31 Zola, Carnets d’Enquête, 348-50.
to analyze comparatively, if possible, Zola’s preparatory texts and certain painters, as well as theatrical scripts which, roughly in the same period, adapted novels and represented them on the stage.

In the rather long quotation from the opening pages of the “Notes” for Le Ventre de Paris we made, the gaze of the observer no longer corresponds either to that of a painter or to that of a writer… It is perhaps the gaze of the photographer, but the gaze of a photographer who is looking for the setting and the props for his or her narrative and his or her drama. Nevertheless, what s/he is searching for in the world in which s/he places her or his characters is no longer picturesque. Rather, it is likely to be pictorial, but placing that notion in a horizon which has to do with new aesthetic paradigms, in a picture of the world where time becomes spatial, and space is revealed and explained in terms of time. Furthermore, different perspectives and shifting points of view together with the play of light and shade are explicitly demonstrated, not only in that their settings and sources are revealed, but also the consequences of their effects: diversified framing, varying depths of field, making me dizzy as they become deeper or leading to the mystery of the third dimension, and fantasy effects.

Zola’s position, anticipating or foreshadowing the emergence of the screenplay, in an avant-garde stance, should not surprise us entirely. It belongs to an ensemble of aesthetic and poetical postures which, on various fronts of artistic production already heralded a close relation—and to some extent a harmonious one—between industrial society and artistic production. However, not all avant-gardes agreed to praise that harmony, just as not all modernisms became avant-gardes. That was one of the reasons why cinema was for a long time regarded by many critics and aesthetes as coarse entertainment for the “uneducated masses,” to which not all modernisms—nor all avant-gardes—adhered. Moreover, cinema was not a technical decision, or a choice of a new procedure representative of the literary narrators who created its basis of aesthetic inevitability. We shall seek to demonstrate how this was done.

In order to avoid delving in excessive length into a topic that still deserves detailed investigation, let us quote Jean-Louis Comolli, to emphasize the importance of the approach we are proposing here. According to this author, in the series of texts he has published in Cahiers du cinema:

Une théorie matérialiste du cinéma doit […] tout à la fois dégager “l’héritage” idéologique de la caméra autant que son “héritage scientifique,” et les investissements idéologiques sur cette caméra, puisque ni
dans la fabrication du film, ni dans l’histoire de l’invention du cinéma, la caméra n’est seule en cause: si de fait ce qu’elle met en jeu de technique, de science et/ou d’idéologie est déterminant, ce n’est que par rapport à d’autres éléments déterminants, qui peuvent assurément être secondaires relativement à elle, mais alors c’est cette secondarité qu’il faut interroger: le statut et la fonction de ce qui est recouvert par la caméra.

Pour souligner encore le risque qu’il y avait à faire fonctionner théoriquement le cinéma tout entier sur le modèle réduit de la caméra […] il suffit de remarquer le quasi-total défaut de travaux théoriques sur la bande-son par exemple, ou bien les techniques de laboratoire.32

The last lines of this quotation could lead us to lament the lack of theoretical writings on the film script, and the late interest the script eventually aroused in this regard. However, we cannot follow the history of the script with the same facility with which we can track the development of the “camera obscura” from antiquity to digitalization. On the other hand, it was because of the theoretical interest that cinema aroused as a subject-matter for narratologists that the film script, too, gradually became an object of scholarly interest. It certainly has not been common to investigate the status of enunciation and the importance it may have had in the origin of cinema. There is no disputing that the monocular viewing point, which developed from the Quattrocento Renaissance onwards, led to a requirement so unavoidable for the ideological aesthetics of the nineteenth century that even novelists respected it. That requirement was enthroned in a code according to which “l’œil humain est au centre du système de représentation.”33 Why then does it not appear equally evident and noteworthy that for a long time now the codes integrating perspective in the narrative discourse, or those integrating narrative discourse in the study of perspective, have forged each other and prepared each other? They are a requirement of various poetics simply awaiting materialization.

It is equally interesting, as a complementary point, to be considered as a hypothesis, that the experimentation on perspective, the bringing together of cinema and the novel, is done mostly not on the finished work bearing the authorial mark. Rather, it is done in the texts written as workshop preparation, as preparatory work, or propitiatory act. Now, the perspective with which one experiments is precisely that

33 Comolli 6.
which concerns the naturalist novelist. The experiment which concerns
him or her is mostly that of point of view. It is true that s/he also talks
about the oral information gathered, but above all the differential work
of the naturalist is compared to that of the painter, the good painter,
the painter with a sense of reality. A complementary investigation remains
to be as to the importance of Zola’s appropriation of the knowledge he
acquires from painters’ notes on the creation of his fictional perspective.

In any case, what we are keen to emphasize here is that in
the practical exchange between the verbal register and the representation
of the visible, Zola probably learned, by means of the practice of transpo-
sition, that in representation the subject occupies a point of emission or
of reception which does not belong to a subjectivity: it is merely the place
in which that subjectivity manifests itself. And that in the practice of note
taking and recovering registers, the same entity is more than a subject
and it easily swaps subjectivities, even if only with the characters that
it places on the stage, allowing them to use the visual perceptions they
gathered in the field.

In conclusion, we may say that Zola’s work in the preparatory
dossiers for his novels enriches the vein “of a collective and anonymous
investigation which in the second half of the nineteenth century tackles
both the representation of reality and the ways of staging it”34 which led
to the creation of cinema. And as for the questions of fictional narration
arising before him, regarding the fracture and indetermination of the sub-
ject—is it not true that he touches upon a question which will become
central to the social sciences, at that time, with the rise of psychoanaly-
sis? The truth is that with Zola’s pre-textual work the narratological
problem of enunciation following a focalization—that is, the problem of
the naturalization of the monocular viewing point—is left open, just as
cinema inherits it later. Its result is the simulation of the narrative accord-
ing to an intra-diegetic perspective to the detriment of the epic or
extra-diegetic voice.

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