



TAKING TIME

AZZEDINE ALAÏA

WITH DONATIEN GRAU

Rizzoli
ex libris

Whatever their domain, creators are faced with the same problems. I wanted to get them talking with one another—about their life, their art, and their relationship with time—so that they could share their experiences, and together we could raise the alarm against the increasing hysteria of our times and the way it has pent up our creativity.

—*Azzedine Alaïa*

AZZEDINE ALAÏA & DONATIEN GRAU

Donatien Grau: Some time ago, you spoke of gathering figures from fashion and the creative world and asking them to take a fresh look at the idea of time. We then undertook the exercise together, inviting those who are close to the House, as well as the people they chose to talk with, and sitting them around the kitchen table for conversation. During those evenings, we spoke of our concerns and experiences with respect to time. There was no audience aside from your friends and collaborators, and it made for some extraordinary moments. We've transcribed them in this book, which I think contains several beautiful stories. But I must ask you: What got you thinking about time in the first place? Why is it important right now?

Azzedine Alaïa: It seems to me that we're living in an era of unprecedented acceleration. Through technology, the internet, Google, we have easier access to everything than ever before. We can feel this change in our lives: Everything's moving faster; everything's getting done faster. In fashion, we've barely finished a collection before we're moving on to another and then another. We must continuously dream up new ideas. I don't think ideas are so easy to come by. When I capture a good idea, I hang on to it and work it out.

The effect of all this haste and thirst for new ideas is the diminishing of our creativity. Never have we resorted to vintage ideas more than we do now. Never have we rummaged the past so much. We're copying clothes from the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s, and these "ideas" we claim to be inventing are retreads of what has already been done. They are not new. Acceleration is killing true innovation, the kind that makes a difference.

I'm not criticizing acceleration in itself and the vast possibilities it offers, but I think we must reserve a space for creation and for life. The young, caught up as they are in the acceleration, have no time for themselves; they have no time to live or create. They therefore advance without having lived, and the time comes when they find they have nothing to show for it: no body of work, no life. They've spent their time chasing down ideas that aren't theirs because they've been rushed. They've not been able to enjoy the riches that life has to offer, and they've not been able to create what they were capable of creating.

The past is clear, we live in the present, and the future is obscure—I often think about that phrase. This present that we're living, we must stretch it out because that's where we exist and where we can create. It's interesting to delve into the past, insofar as it ties in to the present. The future we know nothing about, and we mustn't worry about it. But the present—we're in the present, and we can act. It seems to me a mistake to delve too deeply into the past and forget the present, or to turn toward a future that is unknown to us.

DG: Do you feel this applies to fashion alone or to other creative fields as well?

AA: Fashion presents the most obvious case because you sometimes have exact reproductions of recent clothes whose designers still walk among us. They might see a brand take up an article of their clothing as is, without the slightest change. And nobody makes a peep.

Still, I don't limit my observations to fashion. It's often said that in art or literature, an artist has become old-fashioned, even as that artist continues to develop and evolve. Much later we realize that it was in that moment, when the artist was taking a little time, far outside the frenzy of the art world and the market, that some of the artist's most important works were created.

The same goes for literature. Certain authors exist well outside fashion; what they do is very potent and will remain so regardless of trends. Trends both exalt and exhaust us. Those who get swept up in them have the insolence of youth. They're carried along, but at some point the trend comes to an end, and then they must find the means within themselves to keep moving forward.

Above all, I believe there are creators in every domain. You can be a creator in clothes, design, literature, dance, cinema, art, even cuisine. Whatever their domain, creators are faced with the same problems. I wanted to get them talking with one

another—about their life, their art, and their relationship with time—so that they could share their experiences, and together we could raise the alarm against the increasing hysteria of our times and the way it has pent up our creativity.

I don't think there's a difference between the lives of creators and the lives of non-creators. All are faced with the same questions and decisions. Those who create must find the space to live their own lives, and those who don't seem to create are faced with the same problems. If there's a lesson to be drawn from these conversations, it's that the people who've delighted me with their presence ask the same questions as the rest of us: Why continue to do what we do? What matters? How should we live in this troubled world?

DG: You seem to make no distinction between a life and a body of work, or between life and work. For many, though, there is a difference between the two.

AA: I make no distinction. I live among people I work with, and they live with me. We work together, and we live together. If we are brought together by a common passion or task, then we cannot live our time in some other way.

This doesn't seem peculiar to what I do. My house is open to my friends. They work all the time, but they can come over. The time we spend together is at once friendship time and work time. We're always doing things together.

Sometimes people think of leisure and duty as separate: you must fulfill your duty before you can have time for leisure. But that makes "work" into a sort of prison from which you manage a brief escape. I don't see things that way: no leisure without duty. You simply have to make a space for creation within your constraints, and make your constraints into a creation. This goes for individual life, for everyone's particular work, and for the work of artists.

DG: But I think it's tied to your conception of life.

AA: When new people arrive in my studio, I say to them: "I'm not going to teach you fashion; I'm going to teach you how to live." At my side they can meet someone new every day. Those are the greatest riches, the ones I received from Louise de Vilmorin and Arletty. With them, we could always meet new people. Still today, when I wake up every morning, I wonder whom I'm going to meet. You must be open to encounters, open to your time.

DG: Some of these conversations have led to joint projects, like Adonis acting in Alejandro Jodorowsky's film *Endless Poetry*, or the dialogue between Jean Nouvel and Claude Parent in the *Musées à venir* exhibition at your gallery, which was born of their conversation about time. How did you envisage these conversations? How are they structured?

AA: My house is open. My friends, who are my family, can come over any day. If they're my friends, it's because I like them personally and admire their work. The two are not separate. I'm happy to have them over. It could be to have lunch or dinner, at the kitchen table, or for an exhibition, which would allow us to show their work in a different way.

Jean Nouvel and Claude Parent's exhibition is first and foremost a matter of friendship and respect: they had known each other very well and had worked together. Jean Nouvel has been a friend for thirty years, and our friendship with Claude Parent had been just as intense since our meeting. I cannot express enough how much I admired him, respected him, and appreciated him as a person. He is a true creator, and it was a great honor to host him and have this conversation. If we can continue that conversation, and create a space for it, so much the better. I'd like the same for all my friends.

DG: Your fashion is sometimes thought of as being timeless. Is this because you've managed to impose timelessness on fashion, which you can therefore call upon to "take its time"?

AA: I don't think what I do is timeless. I create clothing for women. I'm always looking at them. I see them on the street, and I look at young mothers and grandmothers. I'm very aware of where they are nowadays. Because I create for them, the clothes I make contain the logbook of my observations.

But it's not every day that you can grasp a great sweep of time. You can try to capture little moments, but that's not what survives. The great moments demand more than vintage: you have to capture where you are. For years I've been trying to make a straight skirt: making a straight skirt that's right now is the hardest thing in the world.

For me, timelessness does not exist. It simply depends on what time you take an interest in. Superficial time, the short term, doesn't interest me. It doesn't last; it's quickly out of date. And everyone forgets it. What matters is what lasts, and what

lasts cannot be founded on too short a time. All the people we invited to take part in these conversations are people I admire, and not one of them is fixated in a short time. They've all managed to transcend.

DG: One last question: Why set up these conversations?

AA: I find it a shame that uncontrolled acceleration should so thoroughly sap our creativity in every domain. People often say that our era is less rich than some other, but it's not true. There are just as many people now as before doing great, original, and new things. But they're under such pressure—from industry, from consumption, from work—that they cannot create. As a result, everything has been separated into leisure and duty, which touches on the very idea of creation. I'm hoping we can avoid that kind of thinking: that we can think of leisure and duty as not being separate if we truly get a chance to do things and if we devote ourselves completely.

I have no advice to give. I've simply sought to present the stories of a few friends who are in the thick of the struggle, and who have managed to construct their time, so that people can see that it's possible.

This is just a beginning.

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Every piece of art is a fight against time.

—*Jean-Claude Carrière*

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE & JULIAN SCHNABEL

Azzedine Alaïa: Julian lives every time period intensely, and he is a very dear friend. I wanted to ask him about the issue of time, with Jean-Claude Carrière, whose works are as of the moment as when they were created.

Julian Schnabel: Paintings bring you into their present. You can look at a painting that was made in 1606 and, if you walk up to it today, it's in the present. When we went to the Musée d'Orsay to look at those Artaud and Van Gogh works with Jean-Claude—

Jean-Claude Carrière: Unforgettable.

JS: They were in our present, and they brought us into their present. That's what painting does. That's what art does. Whenever you discover it. If we saw [the 1946 film] *Shoeshine*, by Vittorio De Sica, today for the first time, it would bring us into whatever that reality is. It's not in the past. It's not old. It brings all that up to the now each time you see it.

J-CC: I was working once with a neurologist. He told me about a test: You draw an island. Then you put a boat on the ocean. If you put the boat on the right side of the island, 75 percent of the people say the boat is going away from the island. If you put the boat on the left side, 75 percent say it's going toward the island. Everything—space and time—depends on our habit.

It is impossible to talk about time today without thinking of space. Since Einstein, we live in space-time. It's impossible to separate the two. As you say, making a painting and looking at the painting belong to two different times, but the painting is there to put together different spaces, of course, and times.

For instance, do you know, when you start to paint anything, how long it will take? Do you have an idea?

JS: It depends on the painting. In general, no.

J-CC: When I'm asked to write a book or a screenplay, I have to know more or less how long it will take. If I believe that it will take me four months, I ask for five. If they don't give me the fifth month, I refuse. I can estimate it, but I need a real freedom inside of that.

JS: Somebody asked me recently to write something about Ai Weiwei. I don't know all of his work, but I know one thing: this man is as important as an artist in what he makes as in being a political prisoner. No matter what he does, it's codified by the fact that he is a political prisoner because he lives in a regime that covertly and clearly prevents somebody from doing what they want to do. He does that in the context of being censored, and his work has meaning because of that—more meaning because of that. His limitations open another space for his existence, for his work and everyone who encounters it.

This is a very clear and emblematic vision in the case of Ai Weiwei because it's a state, a country, the government, that is stopping you from making art. If he were to leave that environment, like Cubans who worked inside the Cuban system and then went to the United States, it would be a totally different thing. Like Reinaldo Arenas's experience. They have no reception here anymore, so that's why many stay, so they can work within that system. That's why also, when writers leave, a lot of people abandon their interest in them because their art is not valid anymore. That was Arenas's initial experience. In Ai's case, he has been able to maintain the relevance of his situation and art, which is unique.

Somebody asked me: "You made a movie about Jean-Michel Basquiat, and you live as a successful artist in the middle of the elite intelligentsia of New York City. How could you make a movie about an artist who died young and who lived on the street?" I said to that person that this was one of the stupidest questions I've ever been asked. If I committed suicide after this conversation, would it validate my work?

J-CC: If somebody were to do a film about your suicide, I'd love to write the script for it. That would be really something. It becomes a situation.

JS: There were young artists I knew, particularly the ones who wanted to be great, who always said: "I've got to die by the time I'm thirty." They're still alive. It's sad they didn't die. I'm happy they're alive, but they did not get the kind of myth attached to their ego that they would have gotten had they been dead.

J-CC: I'll tell you a little trick that I do. Time, with a capital T: nobody knows exactly what it is. It is impossible to give a real definition of time. We are almost nothing, how could we have a sense of it all? And yet there is a practical way not to be overwhelmed by time, but to dominate it sometimes.

For instance, what I have been doing for a long time is, every week I take my agenda

and I just draw two lines across two half days, two weeks later. That way, I know that, some time ahead, I won't take any appointments. Some time is waiting for me. It is very comforting. When the day comes, I do whatever I want. I work. I go away.

The idea of not being a prisoner, of not being afraid of time—I couldn't do without that.

JS: There's a line in the movie *Schindler's List*, when a Jewish prisoner in the ghetto, who is a university professor, is standing there, getting some soup, and he says, "You know, today I've had enough time to complete a thought."

When you're writing, first of all you're editing a lot, instead of directly writing the final text. But at the same time, we come to writing through edits. And the fact is that you do it very quickly. You find yourself a situation, you remember something that it connects to, you illuminate that moment, and then you add or subtract or edit something out.

Painting is a compression of things. When they say "a picture's worth a thousand words," that's true because, again, everything's right there. You don't need to wait two hours to see it. You don't have to do anything, you don't have a meeting, you just do this thing. But at the same time it has a very different relationship to electricity, to time, to the public every time you show it. People might not discover it for a very, very long time, even though it took you a shorter time to make it.

If somebody said to me, "How long did it take you to make that painting?" I would say, "62 years and 5 minutes."

J-CC: In a scene from Marcel Ophüls's film *Lola Montès*, the king of Bavaria is visiting an art gallery and the only question he asks about a painting is, "How long did you take to make it?" That's the only question, and it's very difficult to answer.

In terms of writing, I work my own way. Everyone does. I have always been on time with my work. Even in advance. I have never been late in my work. I wouldn't like it.

JS: You would do it anyway.

J-CC: I learned a lot from Buñuel. Luis and I used to work for two months every day, very closely. We had no one with us: no women, no friends. During that time,

we were on our own, just the two of us. After two months of writing, we have the first version of a script.

We proceed: he goes back to Mexico, I go back to Paris. And we forget about the script for three months. Then we get together again. We take the same script; it is not the same.

Things that we used to like, we don't like anymore. Solutions that we were looking for, now here they are. We called this the invisible worker. I suppose it's the same for a painting.

JS: Yes. Many things I'll do, I don't know if they're good or bad. I leave them like that for a while. I come back and I think, "Now it's good." There's a painting that's going to be shown in Fort Lauderdale—I made it twenty-five years ago. It drove me crazy when I made it; I put it away for twenty years. I pulled it out five years ago, and I thought it was good.

A painting, you can put it away for twenty years. It's not like making a movie. It doesn't work always. Sometimes you don't find a solution. My painting is a time lapse.

There's always the admission of death, the admission of being, of not completing something. Putting those white marks in the paint, it's as if somebody else came in and did that. I don't know how people can accept the kind of limitations in what they do. Because it seems that you are supposed to make something that is contained already, and substance contained is dead.

Jean-Claude and I have been working on a script that alludes to the fact that there is something beyond the nuts and bolts of what seems to be apparent. It also points out how people have become distracted and have traded the natural rotations of the sun for computers, technology, and numbers.

J-CC: There is always a moment when time intervenes. It happens when we say: "Now it is finished, this creation, a book, a painting, now it is over." All of a sudden the master enters the room. You can't do anything anymore.

You have been confronting time.

JS: Hopefully what you make reinvents itself every time somebody watches it. If you can conjure up that sensation of limitation, you feel an illusion of eternity or

the illusion of having that sense of, “Well, maybe I don’t have to die.” Then you can start making art.

Donatien Grau: There is also the sense that you deal with your own work as a material all the time.

JS: I definitely don’t want to do the same thing. I try to take everything I learned to a point where I’m not copying myself. It’s like throwing a script down. You take everything you did, you know that you don’t have to do it again, and then you do something else.

J-CC: It is usual to say that time is experience. My concern about that is the idea that you have knowledge from that experience. Not at all. Experience does not help. Remember that quote by Confucius: “Experience is a lamp that you carry on your back. It gives light only to what’s behind.” Only the best, not what is good, remains. Experience helps you, of course, but you must forget about it as much as you use it.

JS: Which is the same as Diane Arbus saying it was never like they said it would be. It is always what I have never seen before that I recognize.

J-CC: I don’t know about you, but as soon as I feel like I already did a scene, that I have already written it, I don’t do it. I don’t like to repeat.

JS: If I see something that somebody else does in a movie, I think, “OK, they did it. I don’t need to do it.” Sometimes people see films as repertoires. They are talented, often business oriented, and they can take something from somebody else without a problem of plagiarism. They just think, “Oh, it is part of the vernacular, and now we get to use it.” Are they creating something? If I see something I go, “Well, they did it. I don’t want to do that.”

Except when you see, say, the balloon sequence in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *The Red Balloon*. Then you think, “OK, I want to have a balloon. I have seen Steven Spielberg do it. I have seen Andrei Tarkovsky do it. I want to do it my way.”

Andrei Tarkovsky is a guy we need to talk about if we are going to talk about time. He said that art is a representation of life, and in that sense it is different from life, because life contains death. And a representation of life doesn’t [contain death] because it is a representation, so it’s a denial of death. Therefore, art is optimistic,

no matter if the subject matter is tragic. There can never be pessimistic art. There could be mediocre (bad) art or talented (great) art, but it is always optimistic.

That made a big effect on me. I think I made the movie *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* so my father wouldn't be scared to die.

J-CC: I am going to give you a secret that, to me, still is a mystery. There is a time specific to movies, to cinema, of course. It is not the same onstage or in a novel. You have to master it to know it.

In any film, you can go from one scene to another scene. You go from one day to another day, to another country, to another time. But you cannot go from one night to another night. If you go from one night to another night, it is the same night.

I don't know what is so difficult with night. Luis and I spent hours, sometimes days, talking about it.

JS: Because the night is infinite and it is darkness. It's a land, a territory, where cinema can't really enter.

J-CC: It's also a practical thing. You just cannot.

Another thing that I learned from an American editor in Hollywood—he was writing westerns and other films—is that the rhythm between days and nights has to be regular. For instance, the famous bivouac scenes in the western. If you have two of them too close to each other, it doesn't work. It breaks the rhythm of the whole film. You have to respect a pace of days and nights. That is international.

JS: That's a very good point. Without rhythm, it doesn't matter how important your story is; if there is no rhythm, there is nothing. It's like music, in a way. All these are governed by intuition. Some people get it, some people don't.

J-CC: Making a film is a dramatic event. The basis is action, the Greek “drama,” to find a dramatic interest. It is more important. The rhythm will come. Another issue is harmony. Harmony is not quintessential to filmmaking, but it can provoke questions.

That is what we [Luis and I] felt when we wrote *Belle de Jour*: we were looking for a harmony between reality and unreality, trying to balance the two. That was already in the script, and we wanted to give to what we call reality an aspect of unreality.

What we call unreality—the dreams, for instance—we wanted to turn into a real and deep reality. We knew that from the very beginning.

DG: It ties into the whole issue of style.

JS: We need to draw a line between writing and cinema. Cinema is one thing, writing is something else. Painting is something else. Writing is closer to painting than to cinema. Style has to do with intelligence, attitude.

Marlon Brando once said that anybody can act, but it's very boring to watch some actors. When you look at the cumulative work of somebody, if I look at Jean-Claude's work, I get an idea of his style.

When it happens, it's just an idea. But later, when you start communicating with the person and they tell you things that you didn't know but you feel are wonderful, then it is amazing to see people committing to being curious about your project.

J-CC: I'm not talking about style, as far as I'm concerned. I think nothing ever outdid the phrase by Buffon, who, in the eighteenth century, said: "Style is the man himself." Of course, we cannot avoid the influences of our time, of our neighbors or the writers or painters, but the real style is who you are. You will never be able to completely get your style from the rest of humankind.

Inside these surroundings you have to find yourself, and that is real style. Imagine Proust: writers of the same generation, same age, living in the same surroundings at the turn of the century, but he was himself. He is himself in every word he wrote. To be faithful to oneself is essential. Maybe it won't work, not at the beginning.

JS: Maybe it won't work right away, maybe they've got to get used to your stuff.

J-CC: In the beginning, of course, it was quite difficult for Proust. The book was rejected by publishers.

I used to say that if you want a story to go everywhere, it has to come from somewhere, from a precise place. And it must be told by someone or a particular voice. When people tried in the 1960s and 1970s to produce international films, with an Italian actress, German director, French writer, they all flopped. They had no reality. What is difficult for a screenwriter is to write with a direction. You have to work on the same film to say it in the simplest way. It is the most difficult of all, for two persons

or three sometimes, with an actor, to get together and to be on the same narrow line.

DG: The fascinating thing about you, Jean-Claude, is that you have been constantly in dialogue. How do you keep being yourself?

J-CC: I suppose being myself is being with somebody else. That's all. I'm not a lonely person. That's my nature. Working with someone is part of me. Basically, I am a collaborator. The first thing I try to do is to see what exactly is the film the director wants to make and why he likes this film, especially the dialogue. Almost like the work of a psychoanalyst. What interests me is inside.

JS: That's what I tried also to explain to him or show him each time we met. We would go over the script and I would try to make a case, to explain why I want to do this. He would say, "I am here not to agree with you, but to tell you when I see a problem with what you want to do."

As that happens, you start working on the material and then it reminds you of other things. So, I start thinking about the story as a parable that would make sense, and about how that affects a particular character, and all of a sudden the dialogue changes. The story evolves in the desire to make each other understand where you are coming from.

J-CC: Also, when two persons work together—for instance, a director and a screenwriter—it's important not to feel obliged to talk all the time, but to give room for silence. To share a silence is quite important. If you are always in a hurry, you get nowhere. Imagine Luis and I were together, the two of us in my room, and there is a window in a lonely place in Mexico, almost winter, but the window is open and we are in silence, a long silence.

It was raining outside. He was deaf by that time. He looked at me and asked: "Are you listening to the noise of rain?" And I said, "Yes." And he said: "I remember how beautiful it was." It was an unforgettable moment. He was remembering the noise of the rain on the leaves of the trees.

JS: How old was he when he went deaf?

J-CC: Around fifty-five. When I met him he was sixty-three, and he was already deaf. He went deaf because he was shooting amateur rifles and guns. He was shooting in his office. He had a special box made of metal.

JS: Shooting a gun in his own office made him deaf. Like Quasimodo ringing the bell that made him deaf.

There was a moment when, because of what was happening in my life, I was very sad. You and I finally had the meeting we were supposed to have a long time ago. It didn't seem to matter how much time it took. I saw you some years ago. There was a photograph and a film about you, and we met for the first time. I said, "You don't look like this. You looked like the devil in this photograph, and it's just not the right image of you." So I said, "I'll make an image of you." This was five years ago, or ten, maybe. We went upstairs to Toulouse-Lautrec's studio, in your house, and I made the drawing. You liked it. And I said, "It's yours."

You said to me, "I have to do something for you." I said, "You don't have to do anything for me." You said, "No, no, I do." I said, "OK." You said, "I write scripts. So I'll write you a script." So I said: "I've been working on this thing for a while. I'm sure you could help me with it, if you want to." You said, "OK," and I sent him what I was doing.

A lot of things happened with meaningful relationships. You lose something and something fills it up in another way. It was extremely helpful for me.

J-CC: There was a lot of anger.

JS: One day we were talking and Jean-Claude told me a story. You used to go out with Liv Ullmann, who was Bergman's ex-wife, after she broke up with him. You went with her to see Bergman and his wife. You were eating dinner, and Liv said, "Do you still have the house here on the island that you made for me?" "Yes, I do," answered Bergman. She said, "Can we go look at it?"

J-CC: In front of his wife.

JS: "Yes, we can. So, let's go." They all walked over and there's a door. The door has black squares and red hearts painted on it. Liv says to him: "You've kept the door!" Then she said to Jean-Claude: "Every red heart is one day of happiness together. A black square means a bad day together."

J-CC: They are looking at the door and there are lots of red hearts . . . I left them right after that.

JS: It is just amazing that we have the opportunity to know people. Jean-Claude and I have a twenty-year difference and it is a great luck to know him. I feel so privileged that somebody who is older and wiser would feel like it is interesting to spend time with me, and save me, in a way.

If you are an artist, you make art. And if you make art, you have chances that you won't have if you don't.

If you work at a regular job and that's all you've got, it's a much more futile existence. So it is really a privilege to be able to do it. People don't realize that just doing it is the thing, just getting the knowledge, just opening that door and learning how to access that door is the thing.

J-CC: Every piece of art is a fight against time.

JS: And death.

I think all our movies are about the same things.

Time. Life. Loss.

When someone looks at one of my paintings, I want them to feel like there's something else. My friend said that she saw this white shape in a painting I made, and she said it was my shadow.

You can't contain what paintings are in the frame record of film. Basically, everything in the film just alludes to something outside of it, so it keeps self-generating. It keeps alive beyond infinity. It's beyond the frame.

I want my paintings to go beyond the frame. Beyond the materials. So people have a sensation that is outside of that.

J-CC: When the viewer connects with the inanimate object, which is the painting, something else occurs. That something else is really what your movies are about. If I see movies that are just great stories and they're contained somehow by the subject matter, or the story, for me it's not enough.

JS: You think of a movie like *Viridiana* by Luis Buñuel. He's got these people doing all of this stuff that seems very mundane. Many different characters. By the time

you get to the end of the movie, the world has redefined itself in some way. You have a different attitude about your relationship to things that you thought you had a relationship to before.

That's really my goal in making art.

J-CC: One of the great differences between painting and cinema is that you can stay as long as you want in front of a painting. A film is totally different. You have to follow the rhythm of the film itself. It's a totally different approach.

The last time I saw *Viridiana*, I was sitting next to [Pedro] Almodóvar. We hadn't seen the film for at least ten years. We know each other well, but we hadn't seen the film together.

Almodóvar was so taken by the film, so excited. He was jumping on his seat. I was moved at the same time by the film and his response. It was another film.

DG: You are both fascinated with human life, by the intensity of it.

JS: We try to engage with what we are. Either I believe it or not. If I don't believe it, I'm out of it. I have to believe in what is happening. If I don't believe it, nobody's going to believe it. If you're making it and you don't believe it, you're doomed. So you'd better make it as believable to yourself as possible.

DG: You do that through intensifying, bringing it together in a shorter amount of time.

JS: I don't know if I'm intensifying something. Because you really can't tell somebody's whole life in two hours. Whenever somebody says I've done a biopic, I always say it is a portrait. Somebody once asked me, "What's the difference between painting Andy Warhol and directing Javier Bardem?"

J-CC: I used to say that being a painter, for me, was a treat. You are free, you are alone, you do whatever you want. You get paid very well. It's good to be a big and good painter. You don't have to fulfill all the obligations of the producers, of the actors, to listen to the—

JS: Being a painter while making films has given me great freedom because I'm not in their army. I don't care. I don't have to take the job in order to make money. I can say no. That's a great thing, to be able to say no.

J-CC: First rule of liberty is to be able to say no.

JS: I was very interested in film before making any. I never thought I was going to be a movie director, but I watched everything I could. It was my escape as a child from the ordinariness of my life.

So when this guy asked me, “What’s the difference between directing Javier and painting Andy,” I could say one thing: what the similarity was. It was my job not to let either one of them fall through the cracks.

If somebody’s going to give themselves to you, you need to protect them. If you’re going to paint them, you need to paint them in a way that’s the right way, so you don’t let them fall through the crack of your own narcissism or egocentricity. If you’re going to direct them in a movie, and they’re going to be vulnerable and give you everything they have, you have to get your rug that will catch them. You have to give them a net when they fall down.

You see people who don’t care about the actors, and they use them like tubes of paint. Maybe some directors have done a good job like that, but it’s not my way.

J-CC: In *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, there is a really special way of dealing with time because the main character is motionless. He has no space. He has only time.

JS: When I did *Basquiat*, I tried to make it as if everything happened in a week. That was my attitude. In *The Diving Bell*, when Mathieu Amalric would lie still, people would not notice. When you’re lying still, you’re furniture. People don’t know you’re there.

Can you imagine being an actor; you have to be in the body, and not moving. You’re staying there, and you really get a sense of how Jean-Dominique Bauby felt like he wasn’t there. People didn’t notice him because he didn’t say anything. He didn’t move.

J-CC: Like being an armchair or a bed.

JS: I have claustrophobia, and it always pervades my movies. Think of when Javier Bardem is put in the cage in *Before Night Falls*. Javier doesn’t have claustrophobia. I went there and he’s sitting in this cell I built, where the ceiling was so low he couldn’t stand up, because I thought it would be even more terrifying to make it that way, put the dirt in there. He was sitting there like he was waiting for a bus, and I said, “You know, that’s not

the way I would feel if I was in here.” He said, “Well, what would you do?”

I said to the assistant director, “Close the door. No matter what I do, don’t let anybody open it for the next five minutes.” He said, “Anybody who touches the door will get fired.”

As soon as they closed the door, I was stuck in there and I went crazy. My eyes were rolling in my head. I was going insane. Javier was sitting there watching and said, “Man, you’re a great actor.” I said, “I’m not a great actor. I have claustrophobia.”

I got out of there, we turned the camera on, and he just, like a sponge, did all of that stuff. It was amazing. One take. Just let the camera run out.

DG: That relates to how life becomes a story, and how the story becomes a myth.

J-CC: Peter Brook and I decided to adapt the *Mahabharata* for stage and then turn it into a film. We knew it was a huge work; it’s twelve times the length of the Bible. Finally, one night at three o’clock in the morning, we shook hands and said to each other, “One day, we’ll do it.”

Peter told me two key phrases. Both of them have to do with time. One was, “We’ll do it when we do it. No time limit.” And the second, “It will be as long as it will be.” I felt already free—a lot of time, the years in front of me to be able to work, to take my time. No hurry. No pressure at all. Right to the point. The great thing about that freedom is that it preserves you from asking the wrong questions: not to ask yourself who you are, just do things.

In the Spanish tradition, we say, “*Lo contrario de la verdad es la razón.*” The opposite of truth is reason.

The world is irrational anyway, so as soon as you start to make it rational, you’ve made a mistake.

BIOGRAPHIES

AZZEDINE ALAÏA

Azzedine Alaïa (1935–2017) was a grand couturier, a member of the pantheon of fashion history in the league of Frederick Worth, Paul Poiret, Christian Dior, Gabrielle Chanel, and Cristóbal Balenciaga. He entertained the companionship of artists, designers, poets, philosophers, actors, actresses, pop stars, and filmmakers of his time, as well as some of the greatest luminaries and icons of twentieth- and early twenty-first-century fashion and style. The inventor of some of the most influential clothing ever designed, he was a fierce advocate for all creative individuals and for everyone's life, constantly stressing the need for people to take their time and not let themselves be crushed by the demands of industry.

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE

Jean-Claude Carrière is an author whose screenwriting career started in 1963 with his collaboration with Pierre Étaix; in 2018 he cowrote the screenplay for *At Eternity's Gate*, Julian Schnabel's film about Vincent van Gogh. Carrière was also a close collaborator of Luis Buñuel, with whom he worked on four films, and has written screenplays for movies directed by Miloš Forman, Jean-Luc Godard, Michael Haneke, Philip Kaufman, Louis Malle, Nagisa Oshima, Volker Schlöndorff, and Andrzej Wajda. Among other distinctions, he has twice received a BAFTA and was nominated three times for an Academy Award; in 2014 he received an Academy Honorary Award for his career in the film industry.

DONATIEN GRAU

Donatien Grau is a scholar and writer. He has published extensively on art and artists and is the author and editor of academic studies on literary history, art history, and the political history of the ancient world, both in French and in English. He served as a guest curator at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and is currently the head of contemporary programs at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. He was the adviser to Azzedine Alaïa for exhibitions and programs at the Galerie Azzedine Alaïa, the couturier's not-for-profit exhibition space, from 2014 until Alaïa's passing on November 18, 2017.

JULIAN SCHNABEL

Julian Schnabel is a painter and filmmaker. His work is in collections of the world's most prestigious modern and contemporary art museums and has been exhibited in many venues, including the Musée d'Orsay, which presented *Orsay through the Eyes of Julian Schnabel* in 2018–19. He is the author of six feature films, including *Basquiat* (1996), *Before Night Falls* (2000), and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). A close friend of Azzedine Alaïa, he designed the House's New York flagship store in 1986 and the Paris store at rue de Moussy. His 2018 film, *At Eternity's Gate*, is dedicated to Azzedine Alaïa.