



Roman

POLANSKI MAY SOON BE PERMITTED BACK INTO THE U.S., BUT HE'S MADE SOME OF HIS MOST COMPELLING FILMS WHILE IN EXILE FROM THE HOLLYWOOD MACHINE. AS HE COLLABORATES WITH ARTIST FRANCESCO VEZZOLI ON A COMMERCIAL FOR A FICTIONAL PERFUME STARRING NATALIE PORTMAN AND MICHELLE WILLIAMS, THE DIRECTOR TALKS ABOUT THE PERILS OF THE MOVIE WORLD AND THE PLEASURES OF SKIING DRUNK AT NIGHT

By FRANCESCO VEZZOLI *and* CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN *Portrait* PAOLO ROVERSI

OPPOSITE: ROMAN POLANSKI, PHOTOGRAPHED IN PARIS ON NOVEMBER 25, 2008.



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: PHOTOS FROM THE SET OF *GREED*. THE NEW FRAGRANCE BY FRANCESCO VEZZOLI (2008). DIRECTED BY ROMAN POLANSKI AND STARRING MICHELLE WILLIAMS AND NATALIE PORTMAN. COSTUMES DESIGNED BY MIUCCIA PRADA.



“ YOU KNOW WHAT I *like* TO SEE AGAIN *and* AGAIN?
SNOW WHITE. I DON'T THINK *they* MAKE
ANYTHING *better*. IT'S SO NAIVELY BEAUTIFUL. ”



When Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli went looking for a director to help him make his latest artwork, he went straight for the biggest. Vezzoli's productions have always served up larger-than-life spectacles studded with Hollywood mythos and celebrity. His piece, *Trailer for a Remake of Gore Vidal's Caligula* (2005), which starred luminaries Gore Vidal, Helen Mirren, Milla Jovovich, and Courtney Love, was an orgiastic "preview" for the 1979 film *Caligula*. For his live play reading at the Guggenheim of *Right You Are (If You Think You Are)* in 2007, Vezzoli cast actors such as Cate Blanchett, Natalie Portman, Peter Sarsgaard, and Diane Wiest. This time, he had his mind set on creating a commercial and an ad campaign for an imaginary fragrance called Greed (heavily indebted to Marcel Duchamp's own fictional perfume piece, 1921's *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*). The artist selected two leading Hollywood beauties who pointedly did not already have fragrance contracts—Portman and Michelle Williams—to be the faces of the perfume. He had Miuccia Prada specially design the costumes. He had art dealer Larry Gagosian produce the project, which will be exhibited at Vezzoli's show at Gagosian Gallery in Rome this month. Naturally, for a work this overloaded with talent, he could think of only one man to direct: Roman Polanski. Last October, in a suite at the Hôtel Plaza Athénée in Paris, the 75-year-old director shot his glamorous testament to a substance that everyone wants but no one can ever get their hands on because it doesn't actually exist (the metaphor couldn't get any better, could it?).

Roman Polanski is far quieter and content in person than his enormous legend suggests. This is a man who didn't just watch some of the most shocking events of the 20th century unfold, he was inexorably woven into them—from the Nazi occupation of Poland to the unthinkable tragedy of the Manson murders in 1969. His own flight from the United States in 1978 is so famous (and erroneously recounted) that Marina Zenovich's recent documentary for HBO, *Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired* (2008), finally exposed the judicial corruption that left Polanski little choice but to go into permanent exile. Thankfully, in part due to Zenovich's digging, Polanski's lawyers petitioned in December for the 32-year-old charges against him to be dismissed. That might bring the director back to Hollywood, but he's had little trouble making his stunning, psychologically explosive films outside of U.S. shores. Polanski has crafted some of the best works ever known to cinema—notably *Repulsion* (1965), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Chinatown* (1974), *The Tenant* (1976), *Frantic* (1988), and *The Pianist* (2002). While he continues to direct, preparing for his next film, *The Ghost*, a conspiracy thriller starring Ewan McGregor, Kim Catrall, and Pierce Brosnan, about a Tony Blair-like former prime minister whose war crimes come all too close to being made public, the world still seems fixated on the cult of Polanski's private life. Can you blame the director for expressing a dislike of American media when it's ceaselessly cast him as the devil instead of the artist who brings the devil to the screen? He now lives a much less Hollywood-style existence in Paris with his wife, actress Emmanuelle Seigner, and their two children. But he did agree to sit down with Vezzoli and *Interview* in his Paris office—decorated with photographs and a broken Eames chair—to smoke a Cuban cigar and discuss his film heroes, his fight with Faye Dunaway, and why *Wanted and Desired* brings him some degree of closure. Polanski proves that he won't be bothered to play the part of victim. He'd much rather direct.

CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN: What kind of cigars do you smoke?
ROMAN POLANSKI: The best. Mainly Montecristo. We only have Cuban cigars here, you see.

Not like in America. [pauses] You know, I did an interview for *Interview* with Andy back in 1973.
CB: I think, in fact, you did two with him. Do you remember the questions he asked you?
RP: Not at all. He didn't care. In those times, Andy was doing it just to do it. He didn't care whether the interview was interesting or not.
FRANCESCO VEZZOLI: In your autobiography [*Roman by Polanski*] there is a passage about how Andy and his group descended on the villa you had in Rome in the early '70s. That's quite a group of houseguests.
RP: Yeah, but they were a very quiet group. They were not rambunctious or anything. And Andy had such gentle manners and was always saying he liked everything: "Oh, that's great," or "That's wonderful." He always had good things to say about everything and everybody. That was his personality.
FV: Or his strategy. Who was there with him? Was Paul Morrissey there?
RP: Yes. And Morrissey was just the opposite. He was very critical. I remember one thing he said that really surprised me at the time, but I have begun to think he is 100 percent right. He said that you should legalize all the hard drugs and just put them on the market. This is absolutely right. It's completely absurd when you think about it. It's a

"I SIMPLY THINK THERE'S LIFE AFTER MOVIES. I HAVE to ADHERE to this PHILOSOPHY, and THEREFORE I LIKE OTHER THINGS, and I HAVE OTHER PASSIONS. NONE ARE as BIG as MOVIE-MAKING, but THEY EXIST."

Third World business and just promotes crime. I don't think that there would be more users if drugs were legalized. I don't know anyone who is not using drugs for the reason that they're illegal.
CB: Right. And you could tax them.
RP: Tax them! Tax them and use the money for the education against them.
FV: That's a wonderful way to start the interview. I remember reading that once in London in the '60s you were depressed and you took LSD. Do you remember the experience?
RP: Yes. [laughs] I remember it very well.
FV: The first time you and I met was at a dinner party. You were telling me that London for you in the '60s wasn't just the happiest moment in your life, it was the happiest moment for the world.
RP: I think so. Definitely. It was a time of great aspirations and hopes and joy in general.
FV: You don't see any of that in the world now?
RP: I see the contrary, really.
FV: Obviously the scene around you in London at that time had a lot to do with your happiness. In the final lines of your autobiography you wrote, "What drove me to take my fantasy world and turn it into a real one? Was it the sexual urge that had somehow been at the root of it all? Was it that I would never have met all the women I dreamed of possessing had I remained an undersize inhabitant of the Krakow ghetto or a peasant boy from Wysoka?" I like that, even remotely, you think that your whole career could be explained by a sexual drive.
RP: There is a Russian proverb: "You will never fuck all women of the world, but you should try."
FV: Did you try?

RP: No, I didn't. But you have to take it into consideration, nevertheless.
FV: I'm sure you know the movie by [François] Truffaut called *The Man Who Loved Women* [1977]. There is a character who falls for every girl he meets. But the only one he really falls in love with is the one who doesn't return his love. Basically it refers to the obsession Truffaut had with Catherine Deneuve. Truffaut was with you at Cannes during the May '68 uprisings.
RP: Truffaut called me one morning and said that I must come to a meeting to discuss what to do about Henri Langlois. Langlois was the head of the Cinémathèque. He was someone very popular and someone I personally liked very much. He had just been dismissed by Malraux, the Minister of Culture. Strangely enough, that started the whole thing. But even in that instance, when I arrived at the Palais des Festivals where this meeting was held in the festival's smaller screening room, I realized it had nothing to do with Langlois—it was simply a lot of left-wingers trying to dismantle the festival. It reminded me of certain moments of the Stalinist period in Poland, and Godard immediately attacked me. He was a fervent Trotskyist at that time, and, well, he was many things . . . That was probably the period when being a Trotskyist was fashionable. I saw a lot of people in this room who had nothing even to do with the festival. They didn't have films to present nor had they been invited. They said, "The festival is over. It's over. We don't want it. We don't want a festival of stars . . ."
FV: No more stars.
RP: They said, "We want a festival of dialogue." I said, "So create some kind of colloquium." I remember Louis Malle was among those voices wanting to do away with the festival—the next year he had a film in competition there! And two years later again! So you see the hypocrisy of those people.
FV: Of all the nouvelle vague directors, whose work were you closest to?
RP: Truffaut. Definitely.
FV: Is it because at a certain stage of his career, he admitted a more relaxed and open relationship with American cinema and his passion for Hitchcock?
RP: It's not because of that. It's that his passion for Hitchcock and his interest in American cinema must have something to do with his idea of the movies. I think that he had a different basis and a real talent. I liked him as a person and I liked him as an artist. At that period, he was the only French member of the so-called nouvelle vague that I would appreciate. Some of the films of the nouvelle vague were excruciatingly boring. Most of them were completely amateurish. It was just one of those periods when suddenly people get ecstatic about something which may later prove to be completely worthless or fake. It was a little bit of the emperor's new clothes.
FV: You were close to Otto Preminger, too, right?
RP: Yeah. I liked Otto very much.
FV: And he was not loved by the people of the nouvelle vague.
RP: He was not loved by many people, including those who worked for him. He was apparently tyrannical. But he was loved by his friends. I remember Mike Nichols was always very keen on him. These times, both in London and in Hollywood, were periods when you would see a lot of each other—unlike now. I hardly meet anyone working in film anymore. In those times, parties and restaurants and clubs would be places where people would gather, and you could really meet and entertain some kinds of relationships.
FV: Do you think that doesn't happen now because it is all a corporate event?
RP: It's simply a different climate. I sometimes feel that I don't live in the same world.

FV: But somehow you've been capable of remaining the epitome of cool for 40 years.

RP: I don't know about that. Maybe.

FV: I decide that. Let me do something for today.

CB: Do you think having that kind of close relationship with other actors and directors and producers was helpful for making your own films?

RP: It was helpful to maintain a certain kind of atmosphere, a mood which is creative in general. It's inspiring. It's positive.

FV: You're right. That doesn't happen anymore.

RP: No, it doesn't. In certain circles it still happens—I think more in fashion than in anything else.

CB: Even from a distance, do you sense that those relationships have changed in Hollywood as well?

RP: That's what I've been told. It's difficult for me to have a valid opinion. But from many friends who I see all the time, who either work or spend time in Hollywood, they say that it's an entirely different era. Mainly the business has changed. It's no longer run by capable individuals, but by some kind of committee. There are no more one-person decisions.

It's decision by committee. It's flat in general.

FV: Who is the Robert Evans of today?

RP: Who is it? I don't know. They recruit from an entirely different background. They're mainly the golden boys or the baby boomers who moved into this industry, and they're looking for something entirely different. They are really interested in numbers and figures. They want to protect themselves.

FV: Even intellectually, they don't want to be confronted by anything.

RP: I don't think they even consider intellectualism.

CB: Do you think the movies you make would be entirely different if you shot them in Hollywood?

RP: Well, this is all supposition. Certainly different, because you are what you eat, as they say. But I think I would have been able to resist some of the traps my colleagues have fallen into.

FV: Something that happened three days ago came to my mind. Ennio De Concini, the screenwriter, just died. I know you often quote from the Italian cinema of the '50s and '60s.

RP: There were so many Italian directors whose films we were always impatiently awaiting—De Sica, Visconti, Fellini, Cavalcanti, Mario Monicelli. They were fabulous movies, and there were great Italian screenwriters, like Zavattini and Suso Cecchi d'Amico.

FV: I filmed my second video in Suso Cecchi d'Amico's house. She has this big couch that is all embroidered by Silvana Mangano. You remember Silvana?

RP: Of course. I knew Silvana. She was with Dino De Laurentiis, and Dino is a friend of mine. Dino wanted me to do a film for him called *Hurricane*. It never happened, although we took several trips to Bora Bora, and Silvana came along. I spent a lot of time with them, or with her, traveling. But I first met her long before that. I went to a festival in Cartagena [Spain], and she was invited there. I remember her very much for one thing: It was cloudy, and some black guy on the beach sold me a little bottle of coconut oil, telling me that I'll get a suntan in spite of these clouds. So I put this stuff all over myself. Not only did I get the suntan, but I burned myself to the extent that I couldn't even put a T-shirt on. Silvana said that a frequent application of alcohol helps. And I can tell you this is true. If it ever happens to you, put alcohol on the sunburned skin, and it goes away. You have to keep putting it on every half hour.

FV: She certainly never got sunburned.

RP: She stayed away from the sun. She told me I was stupid. And she was right.

FV: Did you find her beautiful?

RP: She was extremely beautiful.

FV: I'm sorry. I'm obsessed with her. She was the coolest actress the Italian cinema has ever had.

RP: Yes. And elegant.

FV: You know this anecdote that when she would go to Capucci to have her dresses made, she would commission three of the same one, and during dinners she would go upstairs, pretending she was just going to powder her nose, then come back down wearing what looked like the same dress but it was a new one, just so she would stay immaculate. [Polanski laughs]

I've always been fascinated by somebody who was seductive but not in a sexual way.

RP: You say she wasn't sexy? I don't think I've seen a sexier actress than Silvana in *Riso Amaro* [1949].

FV: I watched *Chinatown* last night. It reminded me that you are possibly the only heir to Orson Welles.

RP: That's very flattering, because he was my complete idol for years, and still is.

FV: When I watch *Chinatown*, I feel *Touch of Evil* [1958]. For me it has this kind of hopelessness about evil that you see in *Touch of Evil*. Maybe it's the period, maybe it's the open cars.

RP: It's really accidental, because I did not at all have any kind of reference to it. In *Chinatown* what I was trying to create was this Philip Marlowe atmosphere, which I'd never seen in the movies the

way I got it in the books of Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler. As a young man, I loved that literature of that particular period. That's what I wanted to re-create. But I didn't think of any film that I could refer to.

FV: I'm saying that I think you achieved the same level of darkness. I meant that as a compliment. Every time I see *Chinatown*, when it gets toward the end, I cry. I really do. I start crying.

RP: Really? Well, it should be moving. If I can evoke such a reaction in the spectator, I am very happy. But I sometimes cry in the moments that are not necessarily dramatic or tragic in the films, often because of the music. I wonder whether it's the music that has that effect on you in this film.

CB: You had to re-score *Chinatown*, didn't you?

RP: Yeah.

FV: And you had to change the director of photography, as well.

RP: Yeah, at the beginning I had the guy who did *The Magnificent Ambersons* [1942]. But he wasn't up to it anymore and didn't evolve with the rest of cinema. It was a difficult moment. Bob Evans wanted me to make the change, and he was right.

FV: But he also wanted Jane Fonda to play the lead.

CB: It's very hard to imagine Jane Fonda doing Faye Dunaway's role. It would have been more *Klute* [1971] than Marlowe.

RP: Here I dug my heels in.

CB: You're glad you picked Faye Dunaway, even though she was so notoriously difficult on set?

RP: Well, I mean, who cares? To the audience it doesn't really matter how much the director struggled with an actor. It's the result that counts. In this

book by David O. Selznick [*Memo from David O. Selznick*, 2000], he wrote that "the only thing that counts is the final result."

CB: It doesn't matter how hard it was to get there.

RP: That's right.

FV: It doesn't matter how many hairs you had to pull out of her head.

RP: [laughs] It doesn't matter what the reaction was.

CB: I love that after you plucked one of Faye's hairs out because it was catching light, her response was to scream, "I don't believe it. That motherfucker pulled my hair out!" And she stormed off set. [Polanski laughs] Did you ever talk to Faye Dunaway after *Chinatown*?

RP: Oh, yeah. Of course. Last time I saw her was in Cannes last year. She was also giving a prize. We met in the bathroom. I was washing my hands, and some woman was washing her hands, and she said, "Hi, Roman." I look up in the mirror, and it was Faye.

CB: You say all the trouble is worth the result. I have to tell you that there is a single shot in *Rosemary's Baby* that has always blown me away. It's during the scene when Mia Farrow is passing out just before she's raped by the devil. She's drugged out and closes her eyes, and you see her floating on a raft in this beautiful blue sea. It only plays for a second, but it always struck me: How did Polanski get Mia Farrow on a raft in a blue sea and only show a second of that footage? That's a lot of effort for something so quick.

RP: It was always for a second. It doesn't matter how long. If it stays with you, that's what matters. If you make it last any longer, you start analyzing the elements and also the way it was put together, and the charm is gone.

CB: I've seen *Rosemary's Baby* probably 60 times.

RP: Really?

CB: Yeah. *Rosemary's Baby* is one of the things I'll remember when I leave the world. Do you have any movies that you've watched a zillion times over?

RP: No, not compulsively. Because when I really love a movie, I don't want to spoil it by too frequent visits. But I like to come back to certain films, which I admire, like *Hamlet* [1948] with Laurence Olivier, like *Odd Man Out* [1947] by Carol Reed, like *Citizen Kane* [1941]. *Citizen Kane*—that film does not age at all. You know what I like to see again and again?

CB: The Disney cartoon?

RP: Oh, it's beautiful! I don't think they make anything better. The charm of this film is just unbelievable, and this naïveté. It's so naïvely beautiful. What is it, corny or something? But I just love this movie. When have you seen it last?

CB: I haven't seen it since I was a kid.

FV: Me neither.

RP: Watch it. Watch it together.

CB: You could remake it . . .

RP: I couldn't do it any better. What's the point?

FV: I like your anecdotes about when they asked you to do the remake of *Knife in the Water* [1962]. That was the year that you were competing with Fellini for the Oscar [Best Foreign Language Film].

RP: That's right. It was right after that that those two guys from 20th Century Fox, John Shepridge and . . . what was the other one's name . . . I don't remember his name, it will come back later . . . They called me to the office. I thought they were going to offer me some fantastic job, which I needed desperately. They told me that they would like me to redo *Knife in the Water*. I mean, (continued on page 123)

“WHAT COMES *out in THE DOCUMENTARY. AMONG OTHER THINGS, IS THE FACT THAT ONE OF THE DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEYS ILLEGALLY INFLUENCED THE JUDGE—WHICH, IF IT HAD BEEN KNOWN AT THAT TIME, WOULD HAVE CAUSED THE WHOLE CASE TO BE THROWN OUT in A WEEK.*”

ARTIST FRANCESCO VEZZOLI LIVES AND WORKS IN MILAN. HIS NEXT SOLO EXHIBITION OPENS THIS MONTH AT GAGOSIAN GALLERY IN ROME. PHOTOS: GUY FERRANDIS, COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY.

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“ BOTH GIRLS—NATALIE *and* MICHELLE—WERE *so* CHARMING *and* SO EASY. THEY *are* VERY GOOD ACTRESSES. EVEN *in* THAT LITTLE MINUTE, *in* THOSE *few* SECONDS, *they* WERE TERRIFIC. ”

it would be an exercise in self-sodomy, you know?

CB: You've given so many actresses their defining roles. Mia Farrow did a lot of Woody Allen movies that were great, but *Rosemary's Baby* I still think is her defining role.

RP: It was her first motion picture. Before that, she only did television.

CB: *Peyton Place* . . . Did you originally want her for *Rosemary's Baby*?

RP: Well, it was more Robert Evans's idea, because I really didn't know her that well. But he was convinced that she would be great, and I went along with it. I met her, and I thought, Okay, fine.

CB: I read somewhere that you wanted to use that actress . . . oh, what's her name . . . she later starred in *Play It As It Lays* [1972].

RP: Tuesday Weld. I wanted a sort of healthier-looking young woman, like a typical milk-fed American that a couple like the Casteveys would be really convinced was good material for a mother—which Mia was not necessarily. But it was a good choice. And it was a terrific time, those few months of work with Mia. She was fantastic to work with.

CB: What's weird is, she's become the ultimate mother since then.

RP: I don't know how many she's got. Fourteen?

FV: Was it Vidal Sassoon who cut her hair short?

RP: Well, I knew Vidal. He was part of that London crowd in those times. We brought him to Los Angeles to cut her hair and made a big deal out of it—you know, invited the press, and so many press accepted the invitation that they had to put bleachers around when he was giving her the haircut. During all that time her hair was being clipped, she was talking about the Indians and other problems that were fashionable at that time.

CB: Are there any actors you worked with in the past who you'd like to work with again?

RP: Many. Unfortunately, my beloved actor, Jack MacGowran, died of flu in New York quite early in his life. He was in *Cul-de-Sac* [1966] and *The Fearless Vampire Killers* [1966].

FV: You should do another movie with Jack Nicholson.

RP: Jack, I enjoyed very much.

FV: You were the only one who could put him to good use. I feel so bad when they make him play the old man who goes after young girls . . .

CB: *The Bucket List* [2007] was shown on my flight to Paris. I didn't watch it.

RP: I haven't seen *The Bucket List*. For some reason, I don't know, I didn't feel at all like seeing that film.

CB: So many of your films are, in part, about the cities they are set in. *Repulsion* is very much about London. *Rosemary's Baby* is about New York. *Chinatown* is Los Angeles. *Frantic* is Paris. How important is the character of a city to your work?

RP: It's very important. It's very important to set your place in a concrete environment. I think Chekhov said that the important thing when you have a play or any kind of novel is to set the roots in a concrete place.

CB: How was it to work on Francesco's fragrance commercial? Was it good to work with Natalie Portman and Michelle Williams?

RP: It was tremendously inspiring. Both girls—Natalie and Michelle—were so charming and so easy, you know. It went so smoothly and all in one day that it was a real pleasure. They are very good actresses. Even in that little minute, in those few seconds, they were terrific.

CB: Lots of great directors do commercials. Like David Lynch did that Gucci fragrance commercial last year. Have you directed other commercials?

RP: Yeah, I have.

CB: Do you enjoy doing them?

RP: Sometimes. But not really. Usually you have

this client and the agency and they talk about this product as if it was a marvel of the world . . .

FV: Like my perfume.

RP: But they take it seriously! Which is absolutely . . .

FV: Appalling.

RP: Appalling, yeah.

CB: You once said that if you could do it over again, you would do acting. Do you still think that?

RP: Yeah, I enjoyed acting very much. In fact, that's how I began. Those were my first steps—onstage, not in the movies. I am disappointed not doing more acting. But you have to learn lines, and it becomes more and more difficult . . . Do you know what I don't like about it? All this hurry-and-wait business. That's what it's all about. I admire actors for their infinite patience. That's why they need all those trailers and all their crowd of people who pamper them. But it is a drag to get up sometimes at 4:30 in the morning and get into makeup, and wait forever until they call you onto the set. On my side, it's different. It's excitement all the time, and I don't give a flying fuck whether they suffer or not, because at that moment I have to forget about their feelings and problems. Once on the set, I share their anxieties and I try to somehow deal with it. But for logistics, I have to overlook them . . .

CB: It's hard to overlook you as a personality as well. You're a director, but you have other interests, and your personal life has always been a big part of the Polanski legend.

RP: I simply think there's life after movies. I have to adhere to this philosophy, and therefore I like other things, and I have other passions. None are as big as movie-making, but they exist.

FV: Did you watch the documentary that Marina Zenovich did on you recently for HBO called *Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired*?

RP: Yeah, yeah, I saw it.

FV: Is it okay if I ask you what was your opinion about it?

RP: Sure. Absolutely. I saw it and, first of all, I thought for the first time someone has told what happened. Everything else that has been written or shown about my problems were just myths that would be rehashed. The media uses the computer. They just get on there . . . When they have to write or something, they just get it on their screens, add a few sentences, and it becomes a snowball gathering around the same myth. And here she [Zenovich] took the pains of getting into the nitty-gritty of it, and got the material in the archives that I did not know even existed, and talked to the people who have never spoken about it. What comes out, among other things, in the documentary is the fact that one of the deputy district attorneys illegally influenced the judge—which, if it had been known at that time, would have caused the whole case to be thrown out in a week.

CB: When you heard about the film's being made, did you think, Oh, God, can we please get over the murders, the trial . . .

RP: Well, first I think she wrote me a letter, and I answered it, "I don't wish you to do the film." And I think she never got that or something. Then later she wanted to interview me. I never had any contact with her until the film was finished. Then she was in Paris, and my secretary asked me that now that the film is completed would I meet her? I said, "Of course. Now I can meet her." She asked me whether now I would let myself be interviewed, and I said that I wouldn't, because if the film is bad, what's the point of me contributing, and if it's good, there's even more reason for me not to be part of it, because everybody would think that it's some form of self-promotion. She agreed with me.

FV: I think that's the reason why the film is so powerful. Your absence makes the product politically

powerful. You're exactly right. When you see it, you look like the biggest hero. And your absence makes it look even more so, because there are all these people who were really there explaining.

RP: Well, the district attorney says that he understands why I left. How you can say more?

CB: Do you feel very sour toward the media?

RP: Well, I always did, even before that, from the tragedy, you know, with Sharon [Tate, Polanski's wife, who was murdered by the Manson family in 1969]. That's the way I felt with the media. The way it was reported, the way it was commented on. That was quite a long time before my problems.

CB: Was Sharon's death the beginning of the media's becoming vultures around you? Did you expect a different reaction from the community?

RP: Before then I was sort of the toast of the town, you know, and then suddenly the media started amalgamating the murder with *Rosemary's Baby*, with my film . . . I mean, the simple-mindedness of those people is astonishing, even with all perspective of the time.

FV: There is this incapability of cutting a boundary between your movies and your private persona. It's incredible.

RP: It's incredible.

CB: Do you feel like the media here in Paris is much more respectful? Are they nicer to you?

RP: *Nice* is not the word. It's *correct*. And they leave me completely alone. They talk about my work and my films, and it's fine, you know?

FV: Do you like being alone?

RP: Well, I have moments. I like skiing, among other things, because I have moments when I am alone in the mountains. That's fantastic, when there's nobody around you. You see miles around you, and the sun is almost down . . .

FV: Have you ever skied at night?

RP: I have, yeah.

FV: It's beautiful.

RP: Yeah. Drunk also. Except that once I skied with a bunch of people, and everybody was drunk, and we had people carrying torches. There was a guy with an accordion, and I bumped into him, and they all started shouting at me, so I said, "Screw you," and I went off on my own. But then the torches ran off, and I found myself in a forest, at night, without any light, on skis, and that was not fun—particularly because I was drunk, as I said. Luckily at some point I started to see the light of the ski lift. I tell you, to be in the forest in the middle of the night, it's terrible.

FV: It's like a Polanski movie.